

The Third Revolution

Popular Movements in the Revolutionary Era
Volume 3

Murray Bookchin

B L O O M S B U R Y

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REVOLUTIONARY ERA

VOLUME THREE

Murray Bookchin



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For my granddaughter

Katya



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Preface

The Third Revolution has attempted to recount movements in which exploited classes attempted to regain achievements stolen from them by their putative revolutionary leaders. In England in the 1640s, toward the end of the Long Parliament, revolutionary troops marched on London; in the United States in the 1780s local democracies combated the creation of a central government. Such efforts also were made in France, from the Great Revolution of 1793 to the Paris Commune of 1871, and as we shall see in this volume, in the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. Readers of the first two volumes will have noted that the phrase 'the third revolution' is not of my own making. It was raised during the French Revolution, under the Convention in 1793, and during the June uprising of the impoverished Parisians in June 1848; it was raised again, most stridently, by the 'Red Sailors' of Kronstadt in 1921.

The *democratic revolutions* discussed in the first two volumes were primarily focused on political changes, notably the liquidation of the feudal institutions and absolute monarchies, as well as on economic changes, such as the rise and consolidation of industrial capitalism, the more equitable distribution of land, and the abolition of a host of privileges accorded to members of the aristocracy. Despite these eighteenth- and nineteenth-century revolutions, much of the *ancien régime* remained to plague the twentieth century, especially quasi-feudal political and social privileges and military hierarchies. The outbreak of the First World War sparked the great revolutionary upheavals that made the first half of the twentieth century the most revolutionary era in history.

This volume focuses on the emergence, of a new kind of revolution: *proletarian revolutions*. Eighteenth-century Americans borrowed republican ideas from the English, completing in a sense what the Levellers had started in the 1640s; the French in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries added a new dimension—socialistic economic ideas. The French came closest to a socialistic revolution in June 1848, but the Paris Commune of 1871 has

acquired the reputation of the first proletarian revolution in history—especially after Karl Marx tried to show that the Commune was a proletarian dictatorship (a characterization whose fallaciousness he admitted shortly before his death). After the Russian Revolution of October 1917, later insurrections tried to approximate a proletarian revolution as their loftiest ideal.

It has been one of my purposes to examine the doctrines of the revolutionary period and to try to show what was sound about them—and what was decidedly wrong. The pages that follow may be heterodox, but they are also, I hope, realistic. I regard the Bolshevik coup of 1917, for example, as an expression of European socialism. But the most workable set of revolutionary ideas for Russia that were available at the time were those of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, whose revolutionary populism best addressed the crisis in which post-February Russia found itself. If anything resembling socialism could have been devised to suit Russia in 1917–21, it was the program advanced by the Left SRs, not that of Lenin or Trotsky, let alone that of the ideological free-for-all outlook known as anarchism that plagued Petrograd and Moscow. Regrettably, the Left SRs and their program have received relatively little attention in the literature on Russia in 1917.

The fourth and final volume of this series, focusing on workers' uprisings in Germany and Spain, will complete my account of proletarian revolutions.

First and foremost I acknowledge my enormous good fortune in having the aid of Janet Biehl, a superb editor, an author in her own right, and a devoted companion, who gave much of her free time and energy to correcting my manuscript and assiduously checking facts. These were no minor tasks. Janet spent the greater part of her free time over some four years helping me rewrite, clarify, and abridge a very complicated text, smoothing out difficult formulations that otherwise might have left the book accessible only to very knowledgeable readers of revolutionary history. Janet brought a fresh eye, a remarkable literary talent, and an extraordinary degree of patience to the continual insertions and rewrites of tangled events that ultimately made this book accessible to a general public. For her patience, insights, and editorial excellence, I cannot praise her enough.

R.V. Daniels showed great kindness in making available to me his recent books and papers on the Bolsheviks and the popular movement in the Russian Revolution.

I would like to thank Daniel Chodorkoff, with whom I co-founded the Institute for Social Ecology in 1973, for thirty years of close friendship, collegiality and many stimulating discussions. Thanks also to Chaia Heller, whose insights and theoretical abilities inspire in me hope for the coming generation. Brooke Lehman and Betsy Chodorkoff generously provided me with practical

means for dealing with physical infirmities that greatly helped me to write and conduct research. Their friendship and support have been invaluable to me.

I am grateful to Wesley Eldred and June Treyah of the Bailey-Howe Library at the University of Vermont for providing me with indispensable scholarly texts. Through the Interlibrary Loan system, Fred G. Hill of the Fletcher Free Library in Burlington made available to me literature from research libraries in North America and Europe to which I otherwise would not have had access. I am deeply grateful for his efforts in this regard.

I do not profess to have written a work of advanced scholarship. *The Third Revolution* is intended more for the general reader than for the specialist. But it makes accessible scholarly research that is too often found only within the walls of academia, and in its exposition of the popular movements in the revolutionary era, I am willing to affirm that it is unique.

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PART VIII



**THE RUSSIAN
REVOLUTION OF 1905**



CHAPTER 36 The Awakening of Russia

It is one of history's remarkable paradoxes that the most schematic, sophisticated, and revolutionary interpretation of Marxism—a theory born of the Western Enlightenment and the French Revolution—established its deepest roots in the Russian empire, a sprawling landmass whose traditions and social role in European affairs made it a reactionary exemplar of Asian despotism. By comparison with England, which by the mid-nineteenth century was the most industrialized and politically free country in Europe, Russia had barely emerged technologically from the medieval world. This formless continental entity, populated overwhelmingly by an illiterate and largely enserfed peasantry (many of whom lived as little more than chattel slaves), was saddled with a 'divinely' ordained autocracy and a clerical hierarchy modeled on reactionary Eastern Orthodoxy; it was steeped in superstition and a parochially narrow outlook.

This system was the product of a long, impoverished history that saw centuries of cruel defeats of popular aspirations. Unenviably situated between the urban West and the pastoral steppelands to the East, the Slavic *Rus* was buffeted between two antithetical worlds. For centuries the influence of Central Asia reduced inchoate Russia to a tributary of the Tartar and Mongol khanates. Nor was the *Rus* free of internecine warfare: city fought city and prince fought prince, partly for treasure and power, partly in self-defense. The physiography of this vast, often frozen land worked against the creation of a flourishing society. Even the soils of that Eurasian grassland seemed suitable mainly for pasturage and warlike nomadism. Russia's greatest poet, Pushkin, once asked, 'What kind of society could be created out of the saddle of a nomad's horse?' Only the southern belt of the great plain with its loess 'black earth' or chernozem soil provided a good environment for intensive agriculture. Otherwise, every component of the physical environment seemed an obstacle to settlement and stability: bitter arctic winds that swept down from

the north, huge snowfalls, and short growing seasons even in the black earth regions.

The very disposition of the landmass created the need for the emerging Rus to expand if it was to survive enemy attacks: hence it was either being besieged or was trying to besiege and devour its neighboring states. The nomadic Tartars and Mongols, who periodically united into powerful armies, demanded that cities and towns provide them with booty and regular tribute, and murdered princes who were unwilling to debase themselves in supplication. Rebellious populations were simply enslaved or exterminated. Subject Russian princes were schooled in the arts of obedience—arts that they learned to inculcate in their own people. What seemed to many foreign observers like inborn stoicism among Russian peasants, or a quietistic 'Slavic soul' and 'Asiatic' resignation, actually stemmed from implacable social domination. During the First World War, when Nicholas II's German wife, the Tsarina Alexandra, remarked that Russians loved to feel the knout, she echoed a judgement that nearly all of the empire's rulers had held for centuries.

Finally, after successive centuries of expansion, the Russian empire came into existence, stretching from the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea to the western shores of the Pacific Ocean. The empire encompassed a large number of non-Slavic peoples and cultures, all with different religions, languages, traditions, and even levels of social development. Holding such a sprawling and diffuse empire together required a state of commanding and centralized authority, with a military power, a bureaucracy, and the concerted application of the means of terror. Fear was a *sine qua non* for its very existence. To outsiders and visitors, the structure of the imperial state seemed highly stable and entrenched. But the internal Slavic heartland of the empire was by no means a unified whole. Russia was sharply divided along class lines. The two most important social classes—the peasantry and the gentry, including a bureaucratic nobility that administered the empire—lived in completely different cultural, material, and even traditional worlds. Over several centuries a once-free class of farmers had been degraded into poverty-stricken peasants and a large number enslaved, indeed reduced to virtual chattel slavery. This immense oppressed agrarian class constituted more than 90 per cent of the population in late imperial times. More than half of its members were serfs of individual masters and of the Church, living in villages on the manorial estates of the gentry or of monasteries. Most of the remainder were 'state'-controlled peasants, working the vast estates and newly conquered lands controlled by the monarchy. The world of the gentry was far removed from that of the exploited tillers of the soil—indeed, most well-to-do landowners spent the long Russian winters in their city mansions, leaving the management of their estates to unscrupulous supervisors.

RUSSIA'S PARADOXES

History, however, is replete with turning points and unfulfilled possibilities. A freer and more enlightened Russia might well have emerged, had its internal development not been trammelled by outside invaders. During the middle of the eleventh century, Kiev could have become to European Russia what Paris was to France. Like the nearby cities of Suzdal, Vladimir, and Gallich, this city on the Dnieper was notable for its vibrant spirit of progress and even freedom. Kiev's wealth was based principally on agriculture, but in striking contrast to Western Europe, Kiev and its neighbors had no real feudal system. To be sure, serfdom, growing out of the indebtedness of the peasants to moneylenders, was beginning to appear, and slaves, composed mainly of prisoners of war, were a continual presence. But even landless workers, who were obliged to sell their labor to the gentry, enjoyed the same political rights as the more pecunious Kievans. Most of Kiev's food cultivators were free and independent farmers (*smerds*) who owned their own homes, land, implements, and animals.

Moreover, the city was a commercial center as early as the fifth century and flourished both economically and culturally, reaching its zenith in the eleventh. Its eight marketplaces, teeming with wares from as far away as Constantinople, made Kiev one of the most worldly cities in northern Europe. Like its neighboring cities, Kiev was run not merely by a prince but by a citizens' assembly or *veche* composed of all free men. The powers of the nobles and princes were limited by a legal code that carefully defined their powers. These neighboring cities joined together in the tenth century to form a loose federation of city-states, known as the Kievan Rus, nominally led by the grand prince of Kiev.

Whether this way of life could have persisted and expanded throughout Slavic Russia must remain a matter of conjecture, for it came to a sudden and untimely end. In 1199 the city was sacked by rival princes, and in 1240 it was overrun by Tartar and Mongol nomads; Kievan democracy as well as independence came to an early end. As the Kievan confederation fell, the southern Rus atrophied economically and culturally, its cities shriveling in size and its roads falling into ruin.

The decline of Kiev and its federation shifted the center of political gravity in free Russia northward to Novgorod and its dependency, Pskov. These two cities were protected from Mongol occupation by forests and swamps and hence retained their ancient democratic *veche* well into the fifteenth century, leaving their political life vibrantly free. At its height in the fourteenth century, Novgorod had a population of 30,000, many of whose members were foreign merchants; indeed after it became fairly large, the city was not self-sufficient agriculturally and depended upon trade for its existence. As part of the great

Baltic commercial market, Novgorod carried on a vigorous trade with German, Lithuanian, and Swedish cities—indeed, members of the Hanseatic League maintained semi-independent quarters in Novgorod.

Novgorod's *veche* was based on its component five wards (formerly five independent satellite towns), each of which retained its own local *veche*, council, and administrative officials. Each ward, in turn, was divided into 'hundreds', which were then combined to form streets. 'Throughout the system,' as Bernard Pares tells us, 'ran the same principles of local self-government.'¹ Eventually, to be sure, Novgorod developed a complex hierarchy of social classes, and the nobility gained considerable *de facto* power. But until that happened, as Michael T. Florinsky observes, the *veche* functioned remarkably democratically:

The *veche* was the institution through which the urban populace expressed its will and took part in public affairs. . . . [It] was an assembly of the adult male population of the cities and their dependencies. There were no franchise requirements and no fixed rules of procedure. The *veche* could be summoned either by the prince or by a high officer . . . or by any citizen. Its decision was required on every occasion when the prince was in need of effective popular support, for instance, in the declaration of war. . . . Crude, ruthless, passionate, anarchistic, and often bloody as were the meetings of the *veche*, it was the nearest approach to a democratic institution Russia has ever experienced.²

In the earlier days of Novgorod's democracy, the *veche* could be convened by anyone who simply rang the great *veche* bell in the town hall. But differences among various factions in the assembly, especially those based on differing class interests, led to conflicts that could be settled only by sheer muscle power and bludgeons: the groups met on the bridge over the Volkhov River, which bisected the city, and attacked one another in a wild free-for-all, each group trying to throw its foes into the river. Such battles, presumably conducted to achieve the traditional unanimity that was expected in early Russian village assemblies, could become so bitter that the city's archbishop and clergy, clothed in full church vestments and raising religious banners and icons, would intervene to bring the fighting to an end.

The general *veche*, however, had virtually unlimited powers. It could invite, replace, or simply dismiss ruling princes and even select the archbishop. It could decide on all momentous issues, from declarations of war and the mobilization of troops to the imposition of taxes. Novgorod's judicial system, based on juries and mediation, was notable for its mildness and humaneness (in contrast to its *veche*), with minimal if any recourse to torture. This feature

alone distinguished it from nearly all cities of that era, Western and Russian alike. But following the city's annexation by Ivan III in 1477, the *coup de grâce* to Novgorod's democracy was delivered in 1570 by Ivan IV, who deported the city's upper classes to Muscovy and slaughtered thousands of its ordinary citizens. After this bloody conquest, Novgorod faded into a gray provincial town, never to recover its brilliant status.

Nearby Pskov, whose population was far less differentiated by class than Novgorod's, remained a flourishing democracy up to the time of its takeover by Muscovy. Unfortunately, and perhaps unavoidably, most of the relatively free Slavic city-states that were not immediately subjugated to nomad invaders fell into internal discord owing to the development of privileged and antagonistic classes. The conflict between the haves and have-nots within most of the free cities, in large part a product of material scarcity, led to their internal social stratification. As power was concentrated into the hands of privileged classes, civic life became increasingly demoralized. In a world perpetually threatened by invasion from Tartar, Mongol, and Turkic nomads, by the imperialism of despotic city-states from the south, and by rapacious states from the west, any effort to retain urban levels of material egalitarianism would have required a much higher technological level and a much greater abundance of goods than was possible at the time.

But in their heyday the free cities of northwestern Russia were in close contact with Europe, and the Hansa towns carried on a steady economic and cultural exchange with Russian communities near the Baltic Sea. Not only were these Russian communities nourished by Western trade, they also imbibed many of the West's cultural traditions, including elements that would later give rise to the more politically vigorous European city-states. Had Russia been able to retain its Novgorodan traditions, drive back the nomads, and keep its face turned toward the West, it might well have flourished like the freest and most advanced cities of Europe.

But history and reality were to dictate otherwise. Although the marshlands and forests of northwestern Russia prevented the Mongol 'golden horde' from sacking Novgorod and its satellite cities, the great nomadic invasions swept over most of European Russia. Significantly, Mongols also occupied Moscow, deeply imprinting the experience of despotism into that city's consciousness and traditions. Mongol rule, a debasing system of sovereignty resting on tribute and fear, lasted for more than two centuries. When Ivan III, the Grand Duke of Muscovy (who was profoundly influenced by his Byzantine wife, Sophia), finally created an independent state in the heartland of European Russia, he also swallowed up the cities that lay within the reach of his armies and governed them along highly despotic Byzantine lines. Thus at a time when the Renaissance was well under way in Western Europe, Russia was being

absorbed by the autocratic Muscovite tsars—and became a thoroughly despotic nation. With the ascent of Ivan IV ('the Terrible') in 1547, the sovereign of Muscovy was crowned tsar ('Caesar') instead of prince of 'all Russia'. This autocracy—with its double-headed eagle and the title of tsar—was modeled more on Byzantium, whose caesars had perfected their own autocracy over the centuries, than on the Mongols and Tartars, whose khanates were basically unstable and comparatively short-lived.

As Leo Tolstoy lamented in the nineteenth century, expressing the lingering dreams of Russia's progressive thinkers:

One *Rus* has its roots in universal, or at least in European culture. In this *Rus* the ideas of goodness, honor and freedom are understood as in the West. But there is another *Rus*: the *Rus* of the dark forests, the *Rus* of the Taiga, the animal Russia, the fanatic Russia, the Mongol-Tartar Russia. This last Russia made despotism and fanaticism its ideal. . . . Kiev *Rus* was a part of Europe, Moscow long remained the negation of Europe.³

Although Russia was undergoing great changes by Tolstoy's time, the empire still had little to show but a lagging industry, severe repression of political and religious dissidents, and gnawing poverty. Save for a grossly privileged, generally ennobled elite whose French-speaking members, from the eighteenth century onward, barely knew their own native language, and whose provincial gentry in the far reaches of the land still believed in ghosts and witches—Russia could justly be regarded as a social and cultural backwater. While London under Queen Victoria was comparable only to Paris as an urban civilization, St Petersburg, the new, seemingly Western capital built by Peter I ('the Great') in 1703, and particularly Moscow, traditionally viewed as the Slavic capital of Asia, were primarily administrative and imperial centers that kept a great variety of people in shackles under the suffocating tyranny imposed by Nicholas I.

Yet England, with its relatively large industrial proletariat, its commitment to progress, and its claims to the ideals of freedom, remained largely impervious to Marx's proletarian socialism; it was to be despotic Russia, with its largely illiterate peasant population, its artisans, its culturally and socially regressive features, and its reverence for a brutal, paternalistic autocrat (regarded by his most oppressed subjects as the 'little father'), which spawned the only Marxist movement that was to make a successful revolution in the name of the proletariat.

Even the most enigmatic of paradoxes, however, can be accounted for to some extent. Russia had entered the nineteenth century as a victorious power over an otherwise undefeated Napoleon and, with its massive serf army and

backward autocracy, saddled itself on Europe as, in Marx's phrase, 'the last great reserve of European reaction'.⁴ This 'great reserve' was the product not only of the empire's vastness—it constituted one-sixth of the earth's land area and could easily have absorbed the North American continent—and its relatively large population, which formed a huge human reservoir for military repression; it was the product of a long, impoverished history that chronicled endless defeats of popular attempts to rise above an animalistic level of existence. For centuries it was closed to the culture of the Western world, and failed on its own to develop ideals of individual worth, free expression, and the most elementary concerns for human well-being.

Even the internal Slavic heartland of the empire failed to congeal into a unified whole. Aside from the mutual hatred that its oppressed nationalities felt for one another, Russian national entities were also sharply divided along class lines. The two most important social classes—the peasantry and the gentry, including a bureaucratic nobility that administered the empire—lived in completely different cultural, material, and even traditional settings. Over several turbulent centuries a once-free class of farmers had been degraded to poverty-stricken peasants, including a large number of serfs who were reduced to virtual chattel slavery.

This immense oppressed agrarian class constituted more than 90 per cent of the population in late imperial times. Yet more than half of its members were serfs of individual masters and of the Church, living in generally pitiful villages on the manorial estates of the gentry or of monasteries. Most of the remainder were 'state'-controlled peasants, working the vast estates and newly conquered lands controlled by the monarchy. The world of the gentry was far removed from that of the exploited tillers of the soil—indeed, most well-to-do landowners spent the long Russian winters in their city mansions, trying to emulate their more sophisticated counterparts in the West, while leaving the management of their estates to notoriously unscrupulous supervisors. The *barin*, as a member of the gentry was known to his serfs, barely took notice of the village—the *mir* or *obshchina*, as it was called interchangeably—until the nineteenth century, when young intellectuals began to study its collectivist values as a key to the moral and social uniqueness of Russia by comparison with the more individualistic rural West.

In the seventeenth century, the gentry—at least that prestigious segment known as nobles, who also owned the largest private tracts of land and were close to the imperial and provincial courts—began to cultivate Western aristocratic manners, dress, languages, and lifestyles, due in no small measure to the demands of Peter I, Russia's major regal Europeanizer. This enterprise served only to deepen the empire's dichotomies. The nobility was hierarchical in its outlook, holding a pyramidal view of society as a system of command

and obedience. The peasantry, by contrast, had an egalitarian outlook and saw the world in terms of complementary relationships in which each household deserved to receive its fair share of land based on need rather than status. Thus, to the nobility, social ties were 'held together by subordination', while to the peasantry, they were 'held together by mutual responsibility'.⁵ Moreover, the nobility, with its new European ways and its appetite for city living, tended to be cosmopolitan, while the peasantry, virtually boxed into its scattered villages, was devoutly parochial. The gentry was 'oriented to state service', to the extent that it was oriented toward any form of service at all. The peasantry, by contrast, was 'oriented to survival', and viewed any external attempt to control the village as morally demonic. Finally, the gentry viewed land as private property, whether it had been acquired by inheritance, robbery, or as a gift from the tsar. The peasantry, in very sharp contrast, regarded land as a communal resource that 'belonged to God' (a typical Russian peasant aphorism) and could not be truly owned by any individual.

This ensemble of peasant ideas—egalitarianism, mutual responsibility, and communalism—was expressed in the village concept of *volya* or 'freedom' (a word that can also be translated as 'will'). In part, it can be traced back to the Cossack frontier spirit of personal liberty in a free-wheeling egalitarian community and included a communal commitment of villagers periodically to redistribute the rich dark soil of central Russia and the Ukraine to meet the changing needs of peasant households—the legendary *chernyi peredel*, or 'black redistribution'.

This peasant view of a 'God-owned' land—so markedly different from the highly proprietary attitudes that eventually developed in the French peasantry—shaped the outlook of Russia's rural masses. The peasant ideal of *volya*, reinforced by the *chernyi peredel*, turned land 'ownership' into a form of public usufruct based on need rather than individual property. Moreover, owing to the traditional three-field system of rotation, which required that a third of all village land be kept fallow for a year to renew its fertility, and to strip systems of farming, the Russian peasant necessarily had to develop collectivist values. Without broad agreement within the village about how land was to be divided among households, sown, harvested, and in the case of meadows and woodlands, shared for the common good—peasant agriculture would simply have collapsed. These village collectivist values and practices, part of the peasant's vision of *volya*, were later pitted against the *barin's* decidedly proprietary values and practices—deepening the contradictions that already separated the *barin's* domain from the peasants and, together with invasions from abroad, making Russia a cauldron of social unrest.

The paradoxes that distinguished the tsarist empire from the nations of the West were not mere curiosities. In time they mutated into explosive social

contradictions that made Russia tremble and laid the basis for rebellions and revolutions that brought it onto the stage of world history. Not only did serfdom remain a blight on Russian society, even after it was brought to an imperfect end in 1861, but the issue of whether to provide the peasantry with sufficient land to make it into a prosperous middle-class yeomanry persisted into the twentieth century. Moreover, the conflicting trajectories followed by revolutionary movements in Russia are impossible to understand without exploring the various views held by the radical intelligentsia on the nature of village democracy and especially the 'black redistribution'. Indeed, one of Russia's earliest revolutionary organizations took the name *Chernyi Peredel*, in order to express the most prized feature of the peasantry's vision of *volya*.

RAZIN AND PUGACHEV

In contrast to Europe, where serfdom had emerged slowly and organically, in Russia it was consciously created in the sixteenth century, notably in Muscovy, whence it spread to the central 'black earth' region. During the reign of Ivan IV, the state made a determined effort to anchor Russian peasants in specific landholdings in order to prevent them from fleeing into the wilder and underpopulated regions conquered by the monarchy. Under Ivan the legal migration of free peasants to new territories was abolished, confining them permanently to their original home districts.

During the stormy 'Time of Troubles' between 1604 and 1613, peasant rebellions shook the autocracy to its very foundations, and its reaction was to further enserf Russia's peasants. Among the many uprisings of the time, the rebellion led by Ivan Bolotnikov in the south was the most conspicuous and, for the authorities, the most frightening. In 1606, this runaway slave, preaching a message of violent expropriation of the rich by the poor, managed to rally to his standard the serfs, discontented peasants, fugitives, slaves, and numerous displaced vagabonds of the south. This motley army reached as far as the gates of Moscow before it was checked by the disciplined troops of the monarchy. Two years after Bolotnikov's rebellion, another army composed of Cossacks and Bolotnikov's scattered followers again rose up but was again brutally defeated. The country remained in a state of continual upheaval, which ultimately degenerated into dynastic conflicts within the ruling strata itself, until in 1613 it settled down under Michael Romanov, founder of the ruling dynasty that bore his name.

Although Cossack bands continued to roam the land and uprisings by peasants, serfs, and slaves were endemic, they presented no major threat to the

autocracy until the legendary uprising of the Don Cossack Stenka Razin in 1670. Razin, a hard-drinking warrior cut in a heroic if barbarous Russian mold, managed to rally every oppressed and militant segment of the population around his standard, from native tribesmen to peasants, serfs, slaves, and wild Cossack adventurers of the Volga region. But despite its great numbers, his riotous and undisciplined armed force again could not prevail over the highly trained and disciplined regiments that were sent against it. Defeated within a year by the much smaller but professional troops of Prince Bariatinsky, Razin, whose revolt had been directed not against the tsar but against the nobility—was delivered over to the crown by conservative Cossacks of his own Don region and executed. According to Florinsky, Razin's uprising:

was typical of the Russian revolutionary movement in the seventeenth century. Spontaneous, violent, anarchistic and savage, it never succeeded in exploiting its initial success, and in spite of the support of the masses invariably collapsed when confronted with organized resistance. Brief as was the career of Stenka Razin, he became the central figure of a popular epic, and his exploits, largely imaginary, are celebrated in songs still heard in Russia.⁶

If anything, the Razin-type myth that a disorganized but fervent mass rebellion could conquer almost any force sent against it nourished a costly reverence for pure popular spontaneity over organized struggle. In later times this myth would become an article of dogmatic belief among intellectuals who hypostatized the 'revolutionary instinct' of 'the people' over the need for concerted, coherent, and well-organized attempts to overthrow an oppressive state.

In response to these elemental uprisings, the monarchy, far from mitigating the lot of the peasantry, intensified its severity. In 1649 it created a new body of laws—the *Ulozhenyi*—that streamlined the government and ruthlessly imposed serfdom on the entire Russian heartland. To the extent that Russian serfs were provided with an ideological justification for their ever-harsher exploitation, it was the widespread notion that the nobility needed their labor so that it could freely discharge its obligations as servants of the state and the tsar. But this old pretension evaporated in 1762 when the 'social contract' between the nobility and the monarchy was jettisoned by Peter III, who issued a manifesto removing all governmental service obligations from the landed estate. As Donald Mackenzie Wallace observes:

According to strict justice this act ought to have been followed by the liberation of the serfs, for if the nobles were no longer obliged to serve the State they had no just claim to the services of the peasants. The

Government had so completely forgotten the original meaning of serfage that it never thought of carrying out the measure to its logical consequences, but the peasantry held tenaciously to the ancient conceptions, and looked impatiently for a second manifesto liberating them from the power of the proprietors.⁷

Amid the unrest that followed the proclamation of the tsar's manifesto, Peter was murdered in a palace coup that placed his wife, Catherine II ('the Great'), on the throne. Even after Peter's assassination, however, a myth spread throughout the countryside that the late monarch was still alive, hiding from the nobility, and was eager to free the serfs once he could regain his throne.

In 1773 Peter's alleged mantle as advocate for the serfs was taken up by the Don Cossack Emilian Pugachev, who rode into Russian history once again at the head of an army of slaves, serfs, Tartars, and Cossacks—this time armed with weapons and artillery produced by a new breed of serf factory workers. The *pugachevshchina*, as the movement was called, spread throughout the southern and central parts of European Russia, leaving in its wake massacred gentry, priests, and smoldering manors. Pugachev undoubtedly had the sympathy of the majority of serfs and oppressed nationalities who knew about the uprising. But again lacking careful organization and faced with trained armies, the uprising had little more chance of success than its predecessors. Pugachev's forces were decisively defeated near Tsaritsyn, and this 'false Peter' was turned over to Catherine again by conservative Cossacks and executed in the capital. Fears of a recurrence of such Cossack-led uprisings were to haunt the upper and even the growing middle classes of Russia until well into the twentieth century. To the revolutionary intelligentsia, however, it was an inspiration.

Catherine was so unnerved by the *pugachevshchina* and later the French Revolution that she abandoned any pretensions to being an 'enlightened despot' and firmed up her alliance with the reactionary gentry. In her Charter to the Nobility of 1785, the empress (to use the designation of Russian monarchs introduced by Peter I) granted the gentry enormous power in local affairs and allowed landowners to exploit their serfs with implacable ruthlessness. Short of taking their lives, Catherine permitted landlords to treat serfs as chattels. They could be flogged, exiled to hard labor, bought and sold as individuals, given as gifts—in short, used and exchanged as commodities—with impunity. From 'peasants' or 'subjects', they were demoted to mere 'souls', and it is no small matter that, for imperial tax purposes, the property of a landowner was estimated not in terms of his income or his acreage but in terms of the number of 'souls' he owned.

While the monarchy adopted the maxim 'Autocracy, Orthodoxy, Nation',

however, the sons of Russia's nobility after Waterloo were returning from France to their estates filled with ideas of the French Enlightenment and the Great Revolution. Particularly in 1812 Russia's rulers were deeply at odds with this new progressive stratum. As Count Semyon Vorontzov, the Russian ambassador to Britain, wrote to his brother in 1792, a war to the death between the haves and the have-nots was sweeping the world, and he presciently warned, 'Our turn, too, will come.'⁸

THE PEASANT WORLD

At a time when the industrial revolution was getting under way in the West, Russian social life was dominated by a countryside that was based on a seemingly ancient system of domestic and economic collectivism—the *obshchina*, or village land commune. The origins of the *obshchina* remain a subject of considerable debate among historians and social anthropologists.* For much of the nineteenth century it was often sentimentally regarded as an ancient collectivist institution that dated back to the very beginnings of food cultivation by the Slavs and other peoples, when all land and goods were ostensibly held in common. More recent research, however, places a strong emphasis on the role that the monarchy, particularly Peter I, played in economically solidifying the Russian village as a stable community reservoir to facilitate tax collection and military conscription.

Male villagers of all ages, even married men with their own families and children—and certainly all unmarried daughters—usually occupied the same paternal household if practicable, pooling their earnings into a common fund from which each adult was allotted what he or she needed by a presiding male, usually a grandfather or at least the oldest father in the family.

* The Russian words that denote the village world—*mir* and *obshchina*—are commonly translated as the partitional or redistributive 'land commune'. According to Dorothy Atkinson,

historians have generally employed the term used by educated society for the modern redistributive commune, *obshchina*, to refer to communes at any point in the past. . . . The peasants, in contrast, used a more familiar and older term, *mir*, to refer to a rural community sharing the use of some land. In the peasants' construction, *mir* could be applied to communities observing either communal or hereditary tenure, since the community was understood primarily as a collectivity unified in the assembly of household heads. Dorothy Atkinson, *The End of the Russian Land Commune, 1905–1930* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1983), p. 5.

Even more striking than this household collectivism was the Russian village's collectivist manner of allocating land. Villages commonly redistributed their land allotments according to the needs of individual households, or as the peasants commonly put it, according to the number of 'eaters' or 'workers' in each household. The actual redistribution of the village's land was usually undertaken by an assembly, or *skhod*, of all adult householders or, in large villages, their elected representatives. Land redistribution was by no means the *skhod*'s only function: it also elected the village *starosta* or 'elder' who guided the assembly through its meetings and acted as the village's spokesman in relations with the landlord, his steward, and government officials. But the fair distribution of land was often the *skhod*'s most important function, especially in the black earth region of central Russia, where the redistributive *obshchina** was almost ubiquitous.

According to the moral precepts of the Russian peasant, it was profoundly wrong to appropriate land as private hereditary property. Worse still, it was sinful for land to become a form of capital, stored up acquisitively for mere gain and used as a source of prestige and power. The ordinary peasant looked with often bitter hostility at the gentry and well-to-do individualistic peasants who legally owned land as a form of wealth, to be bought, accumulated, or sold as a commodity. Excessive wealth, even the modest wealth possible in the Russian village world, was viewed as a moral defilement and as unchristian greed. Indeed, it was fervently believed that it was an affront to morality and godliness for the deserving and the needy to have too little land to satisfy the family's needs, while the undeserving and affluent had too much. The Russian peasant, in effect, was an ingrained leveller.

Holding on to money and goods for their own sake was considered perverse, even antisocial. Indeed, under conditions of *volya* such as God intended for his children (they commonly believed), all would be equal and well provided for in a collectivist social arrangement marked by sharing. A peasant who experienced any stroke of good fortune—be it a lucky windfall, a happy event, or a deserved acquisition of goods—often invited his comrades, indeed the entire village, to share his luck in the local tavern and engage in binges of vodka drinking. This behavior was a form of material disaccumulation: it was regarded as inappropriate not to share one's good fortune with the community as a whole. The dispenser of things on one occasion might well be needy on another occasion and have to rely on the village's spirit of material benefi-

* To avoid confusion, I shall use the term *obshchina* to refer to the Russian village that manages its affairs by an assembly of household heads and redistributes its land collectively, since this is the word that most often appeared in the Russian revolutionary literature of the nineteenth century.

cence. Who could tell, in that small and uncertain village society, when today's dispenser of drinks and food would be tomorrow's unfortunate who needed all the assistance he could get?

While thrift and shrewd bargaining were certainly respected, miserliness and hoarding were viewed with extreme contempt. To be carelessly generous and thoughtlessly to spend any surplus income was seen, almost intuitively, as a communal act that won favor rather than disdain. Olga Semyonova Tian-Shanskaia's personal and detailed account of peasant life in the 1890s provides us with a valuable picture of the values of that world:

You might say that peasants *never* have any money. . . . Your average peasant is not used to having extra cash around, and so he quickly drinks up what little extra money has come his way. . . . Peasants believe that it 'is a sin to pile up money'. Savings are just one more stone around a sinner's neck.⁹

She also points out:

Peasants regard 'capital' [money] as more precarious than land; it can slip from your hands much faster because of the temptation to which it exposes its owner. One of the most deep-rooted and firm convictions among peasants is that one day all the land will become theirs.¹⁰

This future equitable redistribution of land would be an almost millenarian occurrence that would transform Russia morally as well as materially, and would, it was generally believed, indeed constitute the fulfillment of God's own will for a truly moral human condition.

To survive in their harsh environment, the peasants' extremely primitive agricultural methods (including the three-field system of land rotation), and the terrible warfare that descended from time to time—as well as the chronic war that the Russian ruling classes waged against the peasant in the form of exploitation—a well-knit collectivity was patently indispensable. The peasant direly needed not only the material resources to survive the impacts inflicted on him by the natural world and by an inequitable society; he also needed the collective cushion that mutual aid and simple sharing among his fellows afforded him. His collectivism was the product not only of traditional ideals but, above all, unrelenting necessity. In addition, he clung to the powerful and enduring myth that the tsar was his true friend, his devoted 'father', who was kept uninformed of the sufferings of his 'children' by the avaricious gentry and the bureaucracy. This illusion persisted well into the twentieth century and frustrated the populists for several generations after the founding of the *narodnik* or populist movement.

Equally important for sustaining this naïve outlook were the advantages provided by custom and tradition. Having been abused for centuries and forced to use all his cunning merely to survive, the Russian peasant naturally fell back on long-tested strategies for avoiding danger. Respect for elders understandably stemmed from their experience and a large repertoire of orally transmitted knowledge. Hence the Russian peasant was extremely conservative—he was not prone to be experimental, or to take inordinate risks, still less seize upon new ideas. And when faced with a problem that was beyond his personal capacity to solve, he took refuge in the large collectivity of his household, just as his household took refuge in the larger collectivity of the *obshchina*.

Until 1861, the *obshchina* was the serf's fortress against the outside world, whose cultural walls could be breached only by the landed nobility and the state. Those walls not only protected but also enclosed him. The *obshchina* contained the crucial institutions that were needed to stabilize life on Russia's vast open plain. The institutional power of the *obshchina* reposed in the *skhod*, which often met on demand to settle local disputes or problems, to collect taxes and select conscripts (initially inducted into the army for 25 years, later ten), even to address the minutiae of family and personal quarrels. Its primary economic function, however, was to maintain a rough form of material equality, notably by caring for impoverished and infirm peasants where needed and, most significantly, by the redistribution of village land.

THE CHERNYI PEREDEL

How was the *chernyi peredel*, or 'black [soil] redistribution', conducted? To begin with, it was carried out within certain parameters that involved not only the quantity of land that was redistributed as new needs arose but also its productive quality. Garden plots of individual households were regarded as inviolable; they could not be factored into a local *chernyi peredel* but were handed down within the same household for generations. But where communal lands were fairly sizable, the *obshchina* made every attempt to redivide land not only to meet the number of 'eaters' or workers that existed in each household but in such a way that poor, medium, and good-quality land was shared equitably. To achieve this goal, the *skhod* had to consider the quality of a tract as well as its quantity. Accordingly, poor, medium, and productive land was divided into strips, which were allocated to the village's households in sufficient number and quality to meet their needs in a fair manner.

However much this system of distribution satisfied the demand for equity,

it was highly regressive agriculturally. To cultivate their allotments, household members had to waste their time traveling at some distance from one strip to another. Moreover, the narrow strips could not be plowed, seeded, and harvested without collectively arriving at predetermined schedules in order to interfere minimally with an adjacent family strip. Strip farming, as well as the three-field system of land rotation, thus held back modern agricultural advances well into the twentieth century, although it reinforced the collectivist nature of peasant life and values.

The *skhod*, which undertook the actual redistribution, varied in size according to the population of the village. If households were few, the *skhod* might be conducted indoors, in the *starosta*'s house. Such proceedings were relatively formal and were closely supervised by leading villagers who saw to the propriety of the meetings. Where the *obshchina* was large, the *skhod* meetings were best conducted out-of-doors in hopefully clement weather, often near the local church or another public building.

A group composed of the most respected individuals in the *obshchina* would initiate the discussion of the problem that had brought the community together. They discussed it quite openly, under the watchful eyes of everyone in the assembly. At length, when a conclusion to their discussion seemed at hand, the village *starosta* might formally bring the issue before the entire assembly. Vocal members of the assembly could be expected to pose queries, others to provide answers, and if the discussion drifted off the point, the *starosta* would call the assembly back to order again.

Finally, after everyone had talked himself (or herself) out, either a majority opinion or consensus would be reached. If the assembly was divided, the *starosta* simply asked supporters or opponents of a solution to stand to his left or his right, so that a head count could be made if necessary. Often everyone in the *obshchina* was free to attend the *skhod*—children, young men, and women who were obviously not household heads—but only the heads of households could participate in discussions and decision-making. The assembly's decisions normally had a finality that commanded general respect. As the peasant proverbs had it: the decision of the *obshchina* (usually the peasant used the word *mir*) was 'law' or 'sacred' and had to be obeyed—a responsibility that was usually honored with little reservation.

This village democracy, which was lauded by Western visitors as well as by Russian observers, varied from place to place in many details. The *skhod* and especially its powers to redistribute land were commonly condemned as oligarchic in practice, as well as an impediment to Russia's agricultural progress. A *starosta* might be very high-handed, or well-to-do peasants might cannily skew the *skhod*'s decision to suit their interests at the expense of their poorer neighbors. But most peasant villages, in fact, generally followed the form of the

assembly meeting just described.¹¹ More recent descriptions of the *obshchina* tend to be sympathetic to the *skhod* and see it as an impressive example of village democracy.

Numerous as were their differences, the greatest single difference among villages turned around the manner and extent to which land was redistributed. In Siberia and in regions that were non-Russian or free from tight imperial control—notably Finnish and some Baltic, Polish, Tartar, and Cossack areas—the authority of the village to redistribute land was either weak or had never been established. The *chernyi peredel* was most commonly practiced in the huge central region—the black earth belt of highly fertile soil. Within Russia proper, this region extended from roughly the Black Sea north to Kiev and northeast to the Urals and into western Siberia.

In this central and southeastern black earth region the redistribution of land was most prevalent. Before serfdom was abolished in 1861, the highest percentage of privately owned serfs (at least 60 per cent and often substantially more) lived in southwestern Russia, between the Sea of Azov and Moscow—encompassing an area larger than France. Directly to the east, in a somewhat larger area where serfs constituted nearly two-thirds of the population, the gentry favored the infamous *barshchina* or corvée type of work obligation, according to which as many as four or five days of the peasant's work week went to the landowner. Finally, in the north, where the harsh climate made for low soil productivity, the gentry favored the *obrok*, or payment in the form of money or produce, which often compelled the peasant to find work in nearby towns and cities to meet his payments to the landowner.

THE DECEMBRIST REVOLT

In the rapidly changing world that followed the French Revolution, tsarism was faced with tensions and problems of historic proportions. In the early nineteenth century social unrest was becoming sufficiently widespread to compel Alexander I to restrict some of the worst features of serfdom and absolutism that Catherine had earlier reinforced. In time, however, Alexander's liberalism diminished, and his promises of reform were only partially fulfilled. The relatively minor or ineffectual reforms that the tsar tried to enact met with such opposition by the gentry that further, more effective attempts to restrict serfdom came to an end.

Industrial growth, which received a strong impetus from the production of armaments to defeat Napoleon, followed a curiously mixed pattern: the state tried to adapt its new factories to its semi-feudal system by using serf labor

instead of employing ostensibly free proletarians to produce modern commodities. Moreover, the existence of serfdom in the most populous areas of Russia greatly inhibited the development of a domestic market for factory-produced goods, thereby retarding the growth of both industry and a progressive middle class. With the reaction that followed the Napoleonic wars, Metternich's efforts to suppress all liberal thought and institutions in Europe were especially effective in Russia.

Accordingly, attempts to reform Russia necessarily went underground. By the early 1820s two secret revolutionary organizations composed mainly of young enlightened army officers had been formed: the Society of the North, based in St Petersburg, and the Society of the South, based in the garrison town of Tulchin in the Ukraine. In time the two societies joined forces to form a loosely linked conspiracy. Abetted by smaller army societies and even a civilian group, this network basically sought to restructure Russia's government along constitutional lines and to abolish serfdom. The Society of the North, the less radical of the two, hoped to establish a limited monarchy, while its southern counterpart, led by Colonel Pavel Pestel, supported the formation of a Jacobin-type republic. Both societies, despite their differences, were prepared to use military force and, if necessary, even to assassinate the tsar to achieve their ends.

In December 1825, immediately following Alexander's death, the members of the conspiracy rallied several regiments in Senate Square in St Petersburg with the intention of arresting the late tsar's successor, the notoriously reactionary Nicholas I, and his supporters. Serfdom was to be completely abolished, and a parliamentary government, together with Western civil liberties, was to replace autocratic rule.

Despite the high-ranking officers who led it, this 'Decembrist' coup, as it was called, staged by the Society of the North, was organizationally as ill-prepared as it was politically ill-conceived. Its nominal leader, Prince Sergey Trubetskoy, apparently panicked by the boldness of the plan, failed to show up in the square at all. As hour followed hour without any action by their commanders, the rebellious regiments remained inert, in perfect parade order before an empty Senate building, while a large and growing crowd of civilian supporters eagerly cried for arms. Meanwhile the government mobilized its own troops, leading to a confused standoff in which neither side took any action against the other for most of the day.

Plainly the Decembrist rebels lacked the decisive leadership that would have been necessary to take over the state. None of the officers among them exhibited the presence of mind to order the troops into any action, let alone seize the new emperor, who was nervously ensconced in the nearby Winter Palace with his entourage. Burdened by the aristocratic prejudices of their

class, the young officers neglected to reach out to sectors of the Russian population that might have given them the mass support they needed. As night drew near, Nicholas finally took the initiative: his loyal troops used artillery to drive the mutineers from the square in a bloody clash that claimed the lives of numerous civilians as well as the confused rank-and-file soldiers.

In the south the Southern Society fared no better than its northern counterpart. Pestel was arrested on the day of the St Petersburg fiasco. Ten days later, when news of the Petersburg debacle reached the south, the southern officers rose with their own troops, even though the defeat in the capital made it evident that the coup attempt was doomed to failure. After several days of wandering indecisively through the Ukrainian countryside, the troops led by the Southern Society's officers were rounded up by imperial forces. At no point did the leaders of the conspiracy in the south try to take Kiev, which might have given them some urban leverage over Nicholas's forces.

Brought before the tsar's investigating commission, few of the captured Decembrist leaders exhibited any firmness. Even Pestel was evasive, despite the fact that he had authored the most important document of the Decembrist conspiracy, *Russian Law*, whose demands were considered so radical that the coup's own leaders literally buried it before they entered Senate Square with their regiments. This unfinished work, which was made available to the public only later in the century, was a revolutionary Jacobin document that called not only for the abolition of serfdom but for an egalitarian redistribution of the land. Pestel demanded that every Russian male should have access to government-owned land at least sufficient in size to meet all his personal needs and those of his family. In each district of the empire, Pestel contended, the land should be divided into two parts:

The first of these will constitute common land, the other private land. Common land will belong collectively to the entire community of each district, and will be inalienable. It may be neither sold nor pawned; it will be used to obtain the necessities of life for all citizens without exception, and will belong to each and all. Private land, on the other hand, will belong either to the State or to private persons who will own it in complete freedom, and will have the right to do with it what they think best. These lands will thus be used as private property and to create plenty.¹²

So unnerved was Nicholas by *Russian Law* that he concealed it even from the commission that subsequently investigated the uprising. In the end, five of the Decembrist leaders, including Pestel, were hanged on July 13 1826, in the notorious Peter and Paul Fortress in St Petersburg. Most of the other 120

convicted members of the two societies were sentenced to hard labor in Siberia.

The Decembrist uprising became legendary. Its martyrs were the first organized conspirators inspired by Western liberal ideas overtly to challenge the Russian autocracy and serfdom. December 1825, in effect, marked the opening of a new era, in which opposition to the autocracy went beyond whispers in the salons and drawing rooms of progressive nobles, officials, and members of the middle class. In contrast to the elemental uprising or *bunt* of disorganized peasant insurgents, the year marked the beginning of a new ideological, programmatic, and above all organizational level of Russian rebelliousness.

Hardly to be celebrated for any progressive views while he was still a grand duke, Tsar Nicholas I, after the Decembrist revolt, became an intractable reactionary and oriented his rule of the empire accordingly. For more than a quarter of a century, this canny and vindictive man dragged Russia into the bleakest recesses of despotism. He firmly saddled the country with a highly sophisticated secret police system—the notorious ‘Third Department’ of the Imperial Chancery—a stringent censorship, and an educational system guided by the regressive maxim ‘Autocracy, Orthodoxy, Nation’. Any semblance of liberal thought, indeed the merest expression of dissent, met with the harshest of penalties; the mere ownership of an unauthorized printing press became a capital offense. Russians were prohibited from traveling to the West without official sanction. Poland, where Russian autocracy always tried to present its best face to Western Europe, was divested of its autonomy, while all minority religions and non-Russian nationalities were subjected to humiliating restrictions of their civil rights.

But these measures failed to stifle the opposition that was slowly gathering against the autocracy. Following the failure of the Decembrist uprising, Russian dissidents—usually lesser nobles, educated middle-class elements, writers, and students—all began to form small, intellectual ‘study circles’. Historically the most famous of these groups was the Petrashevsky Circle, comprising a number of liberal Petersburg intellectuals, mainly of lower-middle-class social origins, who discussed a wide range of topics and ideas, in many cases anticipating the ideas of later generations of radical democrats, populists, and socialists.

Starting in 1845, the Circle met regularly, on Friday evenings, in Mikhail Petrashevsky’s modest drawing room in St Petersburg. There the participants, numbering up to 40 people, explored current events, read aloud papers they had written, argued over a wide variety of social ideas, and soon coalesced into several tendencies, some of which raised only mild political demands while others were zealously revolutionary. Petrashevsky himself, a follower of Charles

Fourier, was generously humane in his utopian visions; he was a gradualist in his approach to social change and a firm opponent of violence. One of the most incendiary members of the Circle, Fyodor Dostoyevsky (the arguably reactionary novelist of later years), even shed his early belief in a vague form of social Christianity and embraced atheistic materialism and Jacobin ideals. Unknown to its founder, the Circle also harbored young men who were committed to an armed uprising and met secretly, outside the Circle, to exchange their shared revolutionary views. Despite the capital nature of the offense, they even put together a printing press, although it was never used.

In April 1849, after a year of close surveillance, the Circle was rounded up, and 21 of its members, including Dostoyevsky, were sentenced to death. With characteristic cruelty Nicholas placed the doomed men before a firing squad—then at the very last moment dramatically commuted their death sentences to imprisonment in Siberia. At least one man went insane following this mock execution, while Petrashevsky spent the remainder of his life in exile and died in poverty at the age of 42.

Blocked from direct expression, much of the opposition that existed under Nicholas's reign expressed itself in literature and literary criticism. The period between the reactionary tsar's ascent in 1825 and his death in 1855 saw the opening of Russia's extraordinary contributions to the European novel. Russian intellectuals and artists channeled their suppressed revolutionary energy into brilliant works of fiction, many of which were barely disguised attacks upon every aspect of the autocracy, the gentry, the bureaucracy, and all the repressive features of Russian daily life. Alexander Pushkin, Russia's greatest poet and a Decembrist sympathizer, wrote some of his finest verse and short stories during Nicholas's rule. Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*, published in 1842, offered a savagely satirical overview of all layers of Russian society in the days of serfdom and all but initiated the modern Russian novel as a medium for social criticism, a trajectory that culminated in the works of Ivan Turgenev. Other highly influential social critics included the social revolutionary Alexander Herzen and the romantic revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin. For the most part, however, until the death of Nicholas in 1855, Russian political life languished in a strangely troubled limbo. A year later Russia's defeat in the Crimean War at the hands of Turkish, British, and French armies awakened the country to the internal and international weaknesses of the entire tsarist social order.

NOTES

1. Bernard Pares, *A History of Russia* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 71.
2. Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia: A History and an Interpretation* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 1:37–8.
3. Quoted in Bertram D. Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1961), p. 18.
4. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'Preface to the Second Russian Edition of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*', in *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1989), p. 24:425.
5. Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552–1917* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. xxvi.
6. Florinsky, *Russia*, p. 1:285–6.
7. Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, *Russia on the Eve of War and Revolution*, ed. Cyril E. Black (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 297.
8. Quoted in Avraham Yarmolinsky, *Road to Revolution: A Century of Russian Radicalism* (London: Cassell, 1957), p. 10.
9. Olga Semyonova Tian-Shanskaia, *Village Life in Late Tsarist Russia*, ed. David L. Ransel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 144.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
11. For an appreciative description of a village *skhod* by an eyewitness observer, see ch. 15 of Wallace's *Russia on the Eve of War and Revolution*.
12. Pavel Pestel, *Russkaya Pravda (Russian Law)*, quoted in Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, trans. Francis Haskell (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1960), p. 5.

CHAPTER 37 Peasants and Populists, Workers and Marxists

EMANCIPATION AND AFTERWARD

Following the death of Nicholas I in 1855, Russian liberals and radicals viewed very warily the accession of his son, Alexander II, to the throne. What kind of regime would the new tsar introduce? And how would he deal with serfdom? For more than a generation, Nicholas had tried to quell liberal ideas. The new tsar, at 37, was known to have been carefully schooled by his father in autocratic rule and reactionary ideas.

But Russia's defeat in the Crimea in 1856 showed clearly that the empire, once the most formidable reactionary power in Europe, was lagging far behind the Continent militarily as well as politically and economically. Surprisingly, too, the new emperor, the heir of Nicholas, exhibited strong reformist proclivities, and by 1858 it was evident that he was leaning in a liberal direction. The young tsar seemed eager to go down in history as a reformer, perhaps even as a modernizer, and to accommodate the emerging educated and middle classes, who eagerly sought to build a progressive and respected Russia after her humiliating Crimean defeat. With the support of his more progressive ministers and advisers, Alexander II modernized the old system of local self-government, notably the municipal, district, and provincial assemblies. These *zemstva* had been created in the mid-sixteenth century; to an unprecedented degree, under Alexander's reforms, they now took over the provision of important local services, such as education, road building and maintenance, medical and veterinary care, emergency food reserves, and social welfare. Press censorship was relaxed, greater autonomy was granted to nations ruled by the imperial double eagle, and a system of universal military service replaced the coercive recruitment method, by which peasants were hijacked into the tsar's armies for most of their lives.

The prospect of freeing Russia's serfs—many of whom belonged to the state as well as to private proprietors and the monarchy—was an issue of paramount importance in Alexander's mind. In 1861, after much internal discussion and investigations by various government committees, Alexander finally abolished serfdom—the empire's greatest, indeed most embarrassing social burden. The Emancipation granted peasants the right to buy land from their former landlords according to a prescribed formula: they could purchase up to half of the land that they had previously cultivated as serfs for a redemption fee, to be paid to the state in annual installments over a span of 49 years. The other half—the *otrezky*, or 'cutting off'—was retained by the landlord as his own property, to be kept or sold as he chose.

Materially, however, this arrangement actually left the peasant in a worse condition than before Emancipation. The payments that peasants were obliged to make for their own land allotments were heavily weighted in favor of the landlords, reducing the economic impact of the agrarian reform to a minimum: the government paid the gentry the full sum for its lost land all at once, but peasants were obliged to reimburse the government in payments that many villages could ill afford. Indeed, Emancipation became a boon to the many impoverished landlords who were on the edge of bankruptcy. Moreover, many privileges that the peasants had enjoyed as serfs, such as free access to the gentry's forests and meadows, were now closed to them unless they made additional payments to their former landlords.

Accordingly peasant unrest, far from diminishing, began to increase, and the more outspoken press that Alexander's relaxed censorship had created soon made the emperor himself the target of growing criticism. Many provincial *zemstva* filled with former serf owners imposed themselves and their interests on the more liberal *zemstva*, significantly acting as a retarding force on the middle classes and peasants whose representatives demanded serious reform.

The difficulties raised by the Emancipation were addressed by the government in only a piecemeal fashion and over a protracted span of time, leaving the peasantry, middle classes, and liberal gentry increasingly dissatisfied. Meanwhile, most of Alexander's reform policies, including civil rights, began to unravel and move in a regressive direction, outraging liberal opinion and fostering revolutionary sentiments among the intelligentsia. By the late 1860s, populist or *narodnik* movements were emerging and firing up widespread popular unrest. Although Russia had entered into a new era upon Alexander's accession to the throne, the important changes made by the government were in response to rising expectations, pressure, and anger from below rather than the tsar's eagerness to modernize Russia.

'TO THE PEOPLE!'

The new imperial regime and the problems created by Alexander's reforms between the late 1860s into the 1880s created a fertile field for the emergence of a populist movement, in marked distinction to the military conspiracy of the Decembrists. Especially among Russia's educated youth, a cry arose—an appeal to 'go to the people', especially the ignorant if riotous peasantry. Its ideological inspiration has generally been attributed to the writings of Alexander Herzen, who had left Russia permanently after 1847 and become a Swiss citizen to avoid extradition and imprisonment. After flirting with European socialist doctrines, Herzen embraced populist doctrines based on the simple virtues of the ostensibly unspoiled Russian peasantry, which he publicized in writings that, up to his death, enjoyed a very wide underground distribution in his homeland.

Russian populism, in fact, rested on two key tenets that the literate public had entertained long before Herzen began to publicize them. The first was an unrelenting opposition to autocratic rule, by means of either reforms or revolution. To achieve a free Russia, it was necessary to gain the support of the peasants—who formed roughly 90 per cent of the population. According to the second tenet, making a thoroughgoing revolution depended upon fulfilling the hope that the village communal system of self-management and the *chernyi peredel* would not only be preserved but *extended* throughout the countryside and yield a morally induced form of collectivism that could benefit society as a whole.

To all revolutionary populists, the *obshchina*'s system of communal land redistribution was a venerable form of collectivism that reflected the unique moral core of Russian peasant life. Populists were generally convinced that the existence of village assemblies—with democratic decision-making and land distribution according to household needs—could allow Russia to bypass all the ills of Western industrial capitalism, especially the miseries of proletarianization that afflicted England, and move the country directly to a modern form of agrarian communism. The *obshchina*, they held, might well be a means of achieving a virtuous, democratic, and communistic society, without suffering Western industrial travails.

The early 1870s were marked by Herzenesque attempts by young people, principally students, to live with peasants, to 'serve' them, and to proselytize them with messages of social freedom and moral redemption. This 'Children's Crusade', as it was mockingly called, got under way earnestly in the summer of 1874 under the slogan '*V narod!*' ('To the people!'). Large numbers of zealous but naïve youths in their late teens and early twenties dressed up in peasant clothing and tramped along country roads, settling where they could into villages and proclaiming a messianic message of a social resurrection. The

young *narodniki* of the zealous *V narod* 'crusade' endeavored to serve the peasants as ordinary teachers, especially to instruct them in reading, writing, and other basic skills. Although they were often well received, and some peasants listened respectfully to their ideas, most of the populists were no more equipped to talk to peasants than they were to cynical government bureaucrats. When some of the more extreme 'crusaders' exhorted peasants to rise in revolt, they were either ignored or became the butt of jokes. In time the peasants came to regard the young *narodniki* as privileged urban residents or else as alien intellectuals who had little understanding of their lifeways—and in the worst cases they turned them over to the police. The Children's Crusade, in the end, accomplished little more than to disillusion the young idealists, who, discouraged that their message was rejected, returned to their universities and homes. About 800 were arrested and detained in miserable conditions, of whom more than 160 were tried and sent off to years of prison or administrative exile.

The failure of the *V narod* movement, the unresponsiveness of the peasantry, and the emperor's drift away from serious reforms stoked up Jacobin tendencies that were latent in the populist movement, whose remnants ran the gamut from service to political dissent to terrorism against the autocracy. Perhaps the most influential of the propagandistic populists was Nikolai Chernyshevsky, who gained the profound admiration of his generation as much by his personal example as by his writings. For numerous young educated Russians, Chernyshevsky was the epitome of a dedicated, uncompromising, and above all *professional* revolutionary. Ideologically, he stood at the crossroads between the more sophisticated forms of revolutionary populism and the Marxist ideas emerging in the West. Settling in Petersburg in the 1850s, Chernyshevsky wrote literary criticism for the liberal periodical *Sovremennik* (The Contemporary), where he gained a considerable following. His didactic 1863 novel *What Is to Be Done?* stands out among all his writings as the most important and influential. Marx, and later, Lenin, greatly admired Chernyshevsky's work, although he was neither a naïve populist nor a conscious Marxist. In contrast to Russian Marxists (albeit not to Marx), he defended the *obshchina* and its promise for a collectivist society, earnestly convinced that Russia could provide a model for the industrialized West. In this view, Chernyshevsky was at one with most Russian populists and even Slavophiles. But he refused to accept the Slavophilic romantic belief in Slavic cultural superiority and the populist dream that a free Russia was destined to be a world redeemer. Indeed, in certain respects, his views were close to those of the later Marxists, who regarded Russia's 'Westernization' as a *sine qua non* for socialism, a view that placed him remarkably close to later revolutionary ideas that mingled agrarian anarchism with proletarian socialism.

In the later half of the nineteenth century a plethora of Russian radicals, mainly *narodniki*, opposed the autocracy with growing revolutionary zeal and tried to build a national organization that could compete with the regime in centralization and effectiveness. Mikhail Bakunin, a devotee of *bunty*, found followers in Russia who called for the immediate dissolution of the state, indeed of any form of legal constraint and authority. By contrast, Pyotr Tkachev called for a highly centralized revolutionary elite to lead the masses and to establish a revolutionary state apparatus vigorously to suppress the old order, as well as to reconstruct society along socialist lines. 'The Russian Revolution, as any other revolution,' he wrote, 'cannot escape any hanging and shooting of gendarmes, public prosecutors, ministers, merchants and priests.'¹ A firm economic materialist, Tkachev was one the earliest Russian revolutionaries to have been deeply influenced by Marx's writings on history and economics, which he intermingled with organizational views akin to those of Louis-Auguste Blanqui.*

Starting in the 1870s, revolutionaries in Russian cities, not only in villages, began to form *kruzhky*—small groups or study circles dedicated to education and propaganda. The Petrashevsky Circle of the 1840s had been a pioneering endeavor of this kind, although its participants had concerned themselves more with educating themselves and discussing socialistic literature than with public agitation. In 1871 Nikolai Tchaikovsky (brother of the great composer) formed a *kruzhok* in Petersburg that expanded to other Russian cities as well. Ideologically, Tchaikovsky himself adhered to a mystical, anarchic form of social Christianity and was committed to the libertarian notion of a spontaneous transformation of society by the masses. In fact, he and his closest associates abjured any attempt to provide political leadership or organizational guidance to the masses; their own work among the urban proletarians and later the rural peasants was strictly educational and generally ineffective.

NARODNAYA VOLYA

Other *kruzhky*, however, began to crystallize with a view not only toward achieving political enlightenment but toward producing a major political transformation—and to do so by violently challenging the autocracy itself. The economic notion of 'serving the people' was yielding to a political orientation focused on the need completely to alter the Russian state through terrorist and

* For more on Bakunin's and Blanqui's views, see vol.2 of *The Third Revolution*.

revolutionary methods. Significantly, they tried to appeal to the industrial working class that was emerging in Russian cities. The label 'Socialist Revolutionary' came into use as a loose designation for the more political populists, notably those who had veered away from the strictly agrarian concerns of the earlier populists. Revolutionaries now tried to coalesce into Western-style parties with cadres, programs, and newspapers that would reach the general public, especially the proletariat, and to devise methods of collaboration with all the oppressed in the face of common problems.

In 1876 revolutionary circles in St Petersburg attempted to consolidate themselves into a substantial nationwide organization under the name *Zemlya i Volya*. In 1879 the new organization convened a secret congress in Voronezh, where the delegates generally agreed that the most effective means to unseat Russian tsarism would unavoidably be terrorism. The congress thereupon adopted a policy of employing systematic terror as the principal means for destabilizing and ultimately disorganizing the autocracy—following which, it was hoped, the new party would be able to convene a constituent assembly that would be supported by the great majority of the Russian masses.

Historically, the most important result of the congress was the emergence of the *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will), a terrorist organization that had the support of the majority of the delegates. Neither a small *kruzhok* nor a national party, *Narodnaya Volya* would actually gain worldwide notoriety for its boldness, and its members would earn considerable acclaim for their courage and persistence. Among its prominent figures were Andrey Zhelyabov and Sophia Perovskaya, both of whom were veterans of the Tchaikovsky Circle, as well as some of the most important figures in Russian revolutionary martyrology.

Despite their *narodnik* convictions, most *narodovoltsy* (as they were called) were urban in orientation. Indeed, *Narodnaya Volya* was a conscious reaction against the failure of the *V narod* movement 'to the people' and against the older *narodnik* conviction that education and acts of service could prod the peasantry into a massive movement against the autocracy. A Russian revolution, the *narodovoltsy* insisted, could be achieved not by attempts to foster economic discontent among the inert peasantry but only through *political* means—namely the heroic and disruptive deeds of individual terrorists—institutionally to dislocate the autocratic state. The autocracy had to be attacked directly, indeed physically, and its machinery had to be paralyzed by assassinations in ongoing guerrilla warfare against leading authorities and key institutions, particularly the tsar and his most important aides. Only when the *political* apparatus of the autocracy yielded to these attacks would it be remotely possible to reach the oppressed and inspire them to outright revolutionary action.

Narodnaya Volya undertook the most persistent and daring attacks against the autocracy that Russia had yet seen. When its feared executive committee pronounced a death sentence on Alexander, the tsar became so unnerved that visitors to the court noted that they could sense the dread in his demeanor. After several bold attempts on Alexander's life, including one that occurred within the highly protected confines of the Winter Palace itself, the organization finally succeeded in killing the tsar with two bombs on 13 March 1881.

The assassination, of course, produced an uproar throughout the empire. The principal leaders of People's Will—notably members of the executive committee—were quickly captured and hanged publicly. Andrey Zhelyabov and Sophia Perovskaya, as well as Nikolai Rysakov, Timofey Mikhailov, and Nikolai Kibalchich, who walked to the scaffold in Semonyovsky Square in St Petersburg on 3 April 1881, acquired legendary status among revolutionary movements abroad. Apart from the heroic inspiration they provided for later generations, however, the five who were hanged for regicide failed to achieve any major political gains for the Russian people.

Quite to the contrary: the period following Alexander II's death was marked by implacable repression. The new emperor, Alexander III, who had imbibed none of his father's relatively liberal views, responded to the terrorists with savage counterblows and introduced a decades-long period of deep reaction, comparable to that of Nicholas I. He gave the police unbridled license arbitrarily to sweep up all revolutionaries. Narodnaya Volya and its supporters were ruthlessly hunted down. Students were forced to wear uniforms, and their organizations were suppressed; manuscripts had to be censored before they were put into print, and any periodical could be closed down for even the most frivolous reason, simply with the approval of four government ministers. A new repressive cadre of land captains were installed in the rural areas to supervise the already-restricted *zemstva* and municipalities. Even Russian liberals retreated hastily from significant public activity.

The 1880s soon became a decade of 'small deeds'; actions for broad social change were replaced by acts of local service, and once-bold revolutionaries limited themselves to work as schoolteachers, medical attendants, midwives, and administrative assistants to the *zemstva*. In time, these minimal deeds would reap their own reward in helping to create a major agrarian party—the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, or PSR—but in the 1880s a retreat into charitable work largely replaced the robust social activism and ideological challenges that had flared up with the explicitly political populist movement of the 1870s.

This sharp shift profoundly attenuated the very notion of popular agency in struggling for basic social change. As Allan K. Wildman has put it: 'No longer was "the people" viewed as the chosen agency of social transformation; it was

now regarded as the helpless object of disinterested service, moral uplift, and protective measures administered by enlightened *zemstvo* leaders.² It was also a decade of Tolstoyan mysticism, a psychological turn toward inwardness and personal redemption, and often a quasi-religious commitment to a highly idealized good as a matter of personal faith.

The memory of *Narodnaya Volya* lingered on, to be sure, among students who had little or no experience in underground work. Through the 1880s, in courageous attempts to follow the path of the old People's Will, they hatched plots that invariably came to grief, but the violent populist legacy of heroic, often lonely personal resistance never died out. Perhaps the best known expression of this legacy was the attempt to assassinate Alexander III in 1886, by a group of students that included Alexander Ulyanov, the older brother of Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov, later known to the world as Lenin. These young *narodovoltsy* were easily apprehended by the police, and Alexander Ulyanov was hanged together with four other students. But apart from their trial, the 1880s were marked largely by social resignation and political quietude.

THE WORKER-PEASANTS

At the time of the Decembrist revolt in 1825 industrial enterprises in Russia barely exceeded 5000 small concerns, employing about 200,000 workers and producing commodities valued at only 46 million rubles. A full generation later, Russian industry had barely kept pace with population growth and trailed far behind Western Europe in manufacturing, railroads, urban population, and adequate roads. Indeed, as late as 1861 only 7 per cent of the empire's population of 80 million people lived in towns, and as few as 10 per cent were engaged in non-agricultural pursuits.

Following the Emancipation, however, which significantly opened the empire's internal market, Russia's economic development began to take off. Between mid-century and the early 1880s Russian industrial enterprises sprinted from fewer than 10,000 in number to more than 21,000, and its workforce leaped from less than half a million to nearly 800,000. Accordingly, the value of Russian manufactures soared from about 160 million rubles to nearly a billion. Nor did the extraordinary pace of economic growth level off at the end of the century. In 1900 the number of factory workers in places employing sixteen or more employees reached 1.6 million. Adding workers who were not subject to the government's factory inspectorate, and including transport and building workers, brought the number of Russian workers to 3.3 million out of an 1897 population of 129 million. If this figure seems paltry,

observes J.L.H. Keep, it should be noted that 'industrial workers were concentrated in key centres from which, if they acted in an organized manner, they could exercise an influence out of all proportion to their numerical strength.'³

The highly concentrated nature of the Russian proletariat—and its economically strategic features—cannot be overstated. At the turn of the century installations where much of the proletariat worked were highly capital intensive, indeed on a scale unequaled by industrialized countries elsewhere in the world. Many Russian plants and mills, although relatively few in number, had very large workforces: more than a third of Russian factories employed 500 people or more (while in Germany plants with so many workers constituted only 14 per cent of the industrial economy). Nearly a quarter of all Russian industrial workers were employed in plants of 1000 or more (while in corresponding German plants the figure was only 18 per cent). These Russian factories contained the most sophisticated machinery that Germany and Britain placed on the market. Notwithstanding the economic backwardness of the empire, its relatively small *industrial* proletariat (in manufacturing, mining, transportation, construction, and trade) of about three and a quarter million people was employed in the most capital-intensive and hence most advanced individual enterprises in Europe.

WORKING-CLASS LIFE

Most worker-peasants, newly arrived in Petersburg and other cities from the countryside, worked in appallingly cramped and unhealthy conditions. All too often they were also obliged to live in their filthy shops, directly adjacent to their machines and workbenches. Literally locked into their workplaces or buried in congested dormitories, newly arrived peasants were removed as much as possible from any contact with the cities in which they worked. The plants, guarded by brutal factory police who ostensibly kept the 'peace', were often immense compounds with walled, prison-like yards. Thoroughly insulated from the city that surrounded the plant, they might never be permitted to go outside to taverns and public areas, ate their meals in company dining halls, and bought their necessities from company stores. If they left the compound, they were searched by the factory police for stolen goods, and their absence might be carefully recorded, which effectively discouraged them from leaving their workplaces.

After several seasons of work in the city, single men often brought their families to the city for the span of the work season. Based on his own child-

hood memories, Henri Troyat reconstructed life in a small Moscow factory in 1903 that specialized in treating flax and hemp. Once the visitor entered the work area, Troyat writes, he might think:

he was entering a tropical forest of damp and discolored foliage. Bundles of fibres hung from the ceiling and intercepted the daylight. To move forward, [he] had to push the damp and woody beards apart with his hands. The floor was covered with a thick layer of sticky nauseating filth, with here and there a pool of black water in front of a steaming bucket. Along the wall, close to the windows, stood the machines for breaking the fibres, which consisted of two pieces of wood, held together at one end by a strong pin. The lower piece was mounted on four feet. The whole thing formed a sort of cage, about three yards long and three yards wide.⁴

This restricted space 'served both as a work place and a lodging for the worker's family', where they lived

for twenty-four hours a day. At meal-times the whole little tribe sat on the ground between the piles of hemp and the bowls of dirty water; to sleep they stretched out on planks with bundles of fibre as pillows. Living together, these poor people have lost all sense of modesty. . . . They have no embarrassment in promiscuity. The women even give birth here in front of everybody.⁴

At the foot of a machine, writes Troyat, the visitor might see a prone, seemingly sleeping boy, curled on a bundle of rags, who was sweating and shivering with fever, while his father mechanically worked the machine above. Nearby, a mother was seated on an upturned bucket suckling a baby. The atmosphere of the place was kept excessively warm and humid to keep the fibers from drying out, with the result that the workers and their families lived with cracked and dripping walls and ceilings eaten away in part by a brownish mold.

These wretched families, in Troyat's account, never left the workshop throughout the entire year, except to return to their village. In short they slept, ate, procreated, and even died beside their machines. Nor were these 'mills' unusual:

it's the same in all the smaller factories where work is still done by hand or at least by simple mechanical means . . . particularly the small silk and woollen factories and the textile printing works. In these workshops, they sleep on the floor, under the benches, or on looms covered with planks.

The weavers' babies lie in cradles hooked up to the ceiling and are lulled to sleep by the rhythmic beat of the lays.⁴

Until the late 1890s workers might be paid in kind or in company chits, with which they 'bought' their necessities from company stores within the plant compounds. These payments were often very irregular—at best made after a month of work. Workers were normally required to carry occupational booklets that indicated that they belonged to Russia's peasant estate and that listed all the important details of their working backgrounds, including why they had left previous jobs. This internal passport, specifically designed for workers, was an abiding feature of Russian society even after Emancipation and placed them completely at the mercy of their employers.

During working hours their foremen treated these workers as little more than beasts and fined them for every trivial or alleged infraction. The authorities almost always gave the bosses the benefit of any doubt, and punishments were commonly inflicted without recourse to hearings. Any restlessness among workers was normally considered subversive and dangerous. To subdue and control restless workers, factory owners invited Orthodox priests to conduct classes in reading, writing, and especially religious subjects. Every part of a factory or shop had an icon to which workers, especially worker-peasants, bowed, duly making an expansive sign of the cross from shoulder to shoulder, a ritual in which they routinely engaged while beseeching a holy blessing before and after each workday.

But this was a working class that was never tamed. Finding the labor force too volatile, most industrialists tried to replace them with ever more sophisticated machines from abroad. Soon industrial enterprises in St Petersburg, Moscow, Ivanovo-Voznesensk (Russia's Manchester), Odessa, Kiev, and the cluster of textile cities in the southwest were inundated by automatic machines, operated by skilled employees that left the worker-peasants with routine labor tasks that required little or no training. Russian factories thus developed 'labor aristocracies' in their own right, composed of highly skilled and well-paid workers on one layer, and unskilled, badly paid, partly rural laborers on a lower layer, who were grossly overworked and ill-treated.

Yet far from dividing the factory workers against each other, the 'elite' element actually enhanced the ability of all the workers—unskilled as well as skilled—to carry out struggles against the employers. Deeply class conscious and filled with a strong sense of craft pride and self-respect, the skilled workers were the most educated, experienced, and urbanized members of the working class. Owing to their skills and their scarcity in an overwhelmingly rural country, they were in great demand and highly valued by management. They could thus afford to take a fairly assertive position in their dealings with plant

supervisors. Although well paid by Russian standards, they were capable of becoming very radical if aroused and were ultimately more susceptible to genuine revolutionary ideas than other proletarians.

Despite the privileges that this proletarian elite enjoyed—they often earned three or four times the wages of unskilled workers and lived outside factory dormitories in rooms or apartments of their own—they provided a workplace with able militants, the indispensable nuclei or cadres around which all the workers of an enterprise collected. This stratum, especially skilled metal-workers, became the spokesmen for the workers in their department and even in the factory as a whole. Accordingly, they were the stratum the employers most feared because they were the most articulate, the natural leaders of a potential labor movement. They often read the tracts that were surreptitiously distributed to them by student revolutionaries and made their contents intelligible to the illiterate or ill-read worker-peasants in their midst.

The employers nevertheless did surprisingly little to win the sympathies of the workers: every factory was filled with bitter class mistrust and antagonism. Police informers were ubiquitous—in all plants, educational institutions, even taverns and workers' dining places—providing reports not only on 'dangerous individuals' and organizations but on the proletariat's 'state of mind'. The workers, entirely mindful of their presence, exercised the utmost circumspection. A conspiratorial atmosphere necessarily prevailed: extreme caution was a necessity that, if ignored, guaranteed any active worker or revolutionary a place in prison or confinement to Siberia.

Had reformist, Western-type trade unions been permitted to form in Russia, they might well have domesticated most Russian workers as they did their counterparts in Europe. But neither the state nor the bourgeoisie was prepared to permit Russian workers to form legal and independent protective organizations, let alone allow them the right to strike. The authorities did allow workers to form mutual aid societies to assist unemployed or infirm members and their families. They also allowed philanthropic organizations to provide libraries and educational institutions of modest proportions. But if worker-peasants participated in labor agitation and strikes, they might be 'exiled' back to their villages or imprisoned by government authorities.

Industrialists, to be sure, were free to form their own economic associations and had an extraordinary amount of leeway in repressing labor associations. Together with the government, they viewed every working-class industrial action and every attempt to establish an independent union, not merely as an attempt to redress a glaring injustice but as a *political* conspiracy against the social order. Accordingly they granted little or nothing to the Russian working class unless popular unrest, such as a spontaneous riot or strike, panicked them into making limited concessions.

THE BIRTH OF RUSSIAN MARXISM

By the 1890s, the revolutionary intelligentsia began to tilt toward the view that Russia was following the West's road toward capitalism—and as highly advanced industrial enterprises became permanent features of the Russian economy, socialist ideas and organizational traditions, too, migrated from European to Russian cities.

Marx's ideas traveled into Russia well within his lifetime, at first more as an esoteric ideology than as the basis for a political movement. A Russian version of *Capital* (significantly, the first European-language translation to be published) appeared in 1872. It was approved for publication by the imperial censor because its seemingly academic nature and its outsize length made it too forbidding to be seditious. Yet it gained rapid popularity, especially among those who saw in it an indictment of the Western capitalism that Russia, they believed, must avoid. In fact its initial 8000 print run sold out more rapidly than had the original German edition.

Owing to Marx's association with the International and his feud with Bakunin, his work attracted considerable interest in the large colony of Russian students who lived in Swiss cities. Inasmuch as Russia had no significant proletariat or even bourgeoisie in the 1870s, what *narodnik* students found appealing about *Capital* was its indictment of European capitalism's brutal degradation of life and its commodification of all relationships, cultural achievements, traditions, ideas, and values—ideas that nourished the intensely moral populist sentiments of the students and their fears of industrial development.

But this enthusiasm was not wholehearted: what the diffuse *narodnik* tendencies found troubling in *Capital* was Marx's dictum in his preface that 'with iron necessity . . . [t]he country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.'⁵ This short passage, and the more extensive discussions of the same idea that he elaborated in later years, suggested that, to Marx, capitalism was an indispensable and pre-conditional stage in the achievement of a socialist society. By rapidly advancing the means of production, Marx seemed to argue, capitalism laid the objective basis for a society with an adequate supply of the means of life and for a minimum of toil. This notion sharply countered the thrust of populist thinking, which saw in the Russian peasantry's egalitarian and collectivist values the moral basis and institutions for a socialist society.

Leading Russian revolutionaries frequently visited Marx in London, and he began to treat them with growing respect. Russia's defeat in the Crimean War in the 1850s, the heroic deeds of Narodnaya Volya, and the warm response that Russians, both in Petersburg and in Switzerland, gave his writings, eroded his notorious distrust of most Slavic visitors. He learned Russian and studied

Russian economic and social data with great interest. But during his own lifetime, he made surprisingly few Russian converts to his ideas. His Russian admirers usually put his ideas to use too eclectically to satisfy his demands for coherence by incorporating bits and pieces of 'Marxism' into the broader moral and psychologistic contexts that prevailed in Russian thinking.

But this situation began to change in the early 1880s, when the ablest of the *Chernyi Peredel* leaders, George Plekhanov, arrived in Switzerland. Plekhanov, the son of a noble army officer, acquired a reputation as a particularly courageous agitator when, in December 1875, he publicly denounced the autocracy before a small crowd in front of Petersburg's Kazan Cathedral. This was the first time a Russian revolutionary had dared to express such views in a public rally, under the very eyes of the authorities. Plekhanov then joined *Zemlya i Volya*, but when the group's 1879 congress came out in favor of terrorism, he split off from the majority with a group of delegates and adopted the name *Chernyi Peredel*, after the *obshchina's* partitional land practice. Eschewing terrorism in favor of propaganda and mass action, Plekhanov's group argued that only a broad social revolution could overthrow the autocracy, a view that brought the *Chernyi Peredel* very close to Western Marxism.

By the early 1880s Plekhanov found it necessary to flee to Geneva to avoid arrest. He was soon joined in Zurich by two other *Chernyi Peredel* members, Vera Zasulich and Pavel Axelrod. Axelrod lacked Plekhanov's theoretical prowess and Zasulich's flair; but as an outstanding organizer—a rarity in Russia at the time—he was an enormous asset to the new group, even more important than Zasulich, who had gained considerable fame as a terrorist. Axelrod, with his strong proclivity for practical affairs, saw to the publication of the group's paper, which also bore the name *Chernyi Peredel*.

But Plekhanov, Zasulich, and Axelrod were not rural populists in spirit, and from the first issue of their newspaper, in January 1880, a great deal of ideological confusion was apparent. It professed to accept a populist anarchism together with the proletarian orientation of Marx's 'scientific socialism'. In later issues 'scientific socialism' soon began to displace anarchism, and proletarian socialism displaced agrarian populism. As an *émigré* in Switzerland, Plekhanov abandoned his residual populism and became an avowed Marxist, as did Zasulich and Axelrod, and in 1883 they dropped the name *Chernyi Peredel* and adopted the more proletarian-sounding name Liberation of Labor Group. The new group thereupon claimed to be the first authentic Russian Marxist *krughok* (a claim that some populists, such as Pyotr Lavrov, indignantly challenged). Not only was the Liberation of Labor Group intent on popularizing Marx's views among the *émigrés* and in Russia; it also hoped to create an effective organizational vehicle to put them into practice.

The Liberation Group also changed its program significantly. Instead of favoring an equitable redistribution of land, it called for the nationalization and industrialization of agriculture and emphasized the hegemonic role, not of Russia's massive peasantry, but of her very small proletariat. Indeed, mechanically applying Marx's disdainful view of the French peasantry to the class as a whole, Plekhanov concluded that the Russian peasantry was a petty-bourgeois and thoroughly reactionary class whose complete disappearance would be a desideratum for a Russian socialist movement. Notably, he drew little distinction if any between the largely collectivist Russian peasantry and its highly individualistic French counterpart. Strongly influenced by Plekhanov and his small circle abroad, Russian Marxists soon considered the peasants to be a reactionary social class who were eager to become nothing more than grasping private landed proprietors. Even peasants who lived in the *obshchina* were dismissed as a pre-capitalist archaism, destined to be eliminated by inexorable laws of historical development—and the sooner this occurred, the better.

PLEKHANOV'S MARXISM

Plekhanov's influence was slow to penetrate the tsar's domain. Nonetheless European socialists, especially German Social Democrats, soon came to regard Plekhanov as the foremost theorist of Russian Marxism, indeed as its 'father', and treated him deferentially as Russia's foremost representative to the newly formed Second International. Indeed, together with Karl Kautsky, he ranked second only to Friedrich Engels as a popularizer of Marx's ideas. His works were translated into a variety of European languages and may have found a wider readership in Western and central Europe than in Russia.

Russia, Plekhanov argued, would have to pass through a lengthy capitalist stage of development before it could possibly develop the material and cultural conditions for a socialist society. The industrial proletariat alone, he insisted, was destined to become the hegemonic class of a socialist revolution, and he placed a strong emphasis on impersonal economic forces or 'laws' as the driving force of revolutionary development. His conversion of Marx's ideas into the 'official' canon of Russian Social Democracy thus turned Russian Marxism into a highly schematic dogma, a social physics dressed in concise laws and architecturally complete ideas. Marxism in Plekhanov's (and often in Kautsky's) hands remained singularly uncreative: it became highly codified, inflexible, and impervious to new social and political developments. This codification greatly distorted Marx's ideas: although Marxism emphasized the

importance of analyzing society 'scientifically', of prioritizing economic factors, and of focusing on the leading role of the industrial proletariat in a socialist revolution, Plekhanov turned many Marxian ideas into crude formulas that made them as simplistic as they were rigid.

Significantly, before Plekhanov overly schematized Marx's basic views, an amiable relationship had existed between the *narodovoltsy* and the Marxists. The various Russian socialist movements had normally shared their resources and even published each other's works. In 1884, however, Plekhanov and his group in Switzerland launched a harsh campaign against populism that was picked up by other Marxists who regarded any emphasis on the peasant movement as an obstacle to a systematic, presumably 'scientific' theory of revolutionary socialism. Plekhanov's 1884 pamphlet 'Our Differences' insisted that the *obshchina* had to be eliminated by capitalism before Russia could hope to achieve socialism, and he directed much of his polemical ire against *narodism* as 'petty bourgeois' and 'idealistic'.

Most of Plekhanov's younger colleagues imbibed his dogmatism and read Marx's oeuvre very much as though it were a source of irrefutable truth. By allowing for no modifications or 'deviations' from his 'exact' writings and those of his key interpreters, the Russian Marxists developed a conception of a future Russian revolution that became as hardened and lifeless as a dogma. Russia herself would ultimately pay dearly, in time, for the ideological sclerosis that Plekhanov introduced.

MARX ON THE OBSHCHINA

Ironically, Marx did not share the Russian Marxists' disdain for the Russian peasant and the *obshchina*. In marked contrast to his Russian followers, with their aversion to the *narodovoltsy*, he decidedly did not believe that his prognoses on the development of capitalism in Europe could be mechanically applied to Russia. In a letter to Vera Zasulich in 1881, only two years before his death, Marx wrote that the expropriation of the 'agricultural producer', so necessary for the full emergence of capitalism, had occurred in a 'radical fashion' only in England and to some extent in other Western European countries:

Hence the 'historical inevitability' of this process is *expressly* limited to the *countries of Western Europe*. . . . Hence the analysis provided in *Capital* does not adduce reasons either for or against the viability of the rural commune [the *obshchina*], but the special study I have made of it, and the material for

which I drew from original sources, has convinced me that this commune is the fulcrum of social regeneration in Russia, but in order that it may function as such it would first be necessary to eliminate the deleterious influences which are assailing it from all sides, and then ensure for it the normal conditions of spontaneous development.*

Significantly, Marx placed the words 'historical inevitability' in quotation marks. Whatever he may have thought in his earlier writings, the elderly Marx clearly distanced himself from this kind of language and avoided the rigid economic schema that Plekhanov, Kautsky, and others imputed to him.

Rather, and surprisingly, he adopted the populist position that the Russian village, based on the collective ownership of the land, could be the nucleus for a new society, and that the *obshchina* could provide a point of departure for agrarian communism. The *obshchina*, in effect, could be a possible means to bypass a capitalist development in Russian agriculture. In contrast to Plekhanov's belief that the Russian village would have to pass through a 'historically inevitable' phase of capitalist agriculture, Marx suggested that if a successful socialist revolution occurred in the West, Russia might well advance directly to agrarian communism by means of improvements and advances in the *obshchina*!

As late as January 1882, in the course of writing his preface to the new Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx penned several remarkable lines on the role of Russia in the forthcoming European revolution that stood in marked contrast even to the view he held in the 1840s, 'when Russia constituted the last great reserve of all European reaction.' 'How very different today!' he exulted, '... Russia forms the *vanguard* of revolutionary action in Europe.'⁶ 'If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that the two complement each other,' he concluded,

* Karl Marx, letter to Vera Zasulich (Mar. 8, 1881), *Collected Works*, vol. 46 (New York: International Publishers, 1992), pp. 71-2. Marx plainly intended this letter, which he wrote very carefully after rejecting several longer drafts, to be taken as a sober judgment, fully cognizant that his disciples in Switzerland were fighting the *narodovoltsy*. He must have been aware that the *narodovoltsy*, had they known his views, could have used them with compelling effect against Plekhanov. Plekhanov and Zasulich, for their part, prudently concealed the letter for years; it was not published in Russian until 1924, when the issues between the *émigré* Marxists and the *narodovoltsy* long ceased to have strategic importance. Plekhanov, in effect, censored Marx's views and perpetrated the notion that Marx considered the Russian peasant to be 'petty bourgeois', even predisposed, because of his 'class status', to support capitalism. This basically false image profoundly affected Lenin's view of the peasant masses and partly explains his chilly attitude toward his erstwhile Left Socialist Revolutionary allies in 1918.

'the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for communist development.'⁷

To the founder of 'scientific socialism', in fact, the hostility that Plekhanov's dogmatism generated between the *narodovoltsy* and the Marxists seems to have been incomprehensible. Marx had an unflagging admiration for Narodnaya Volya and largely approved even its terrorist tactics. Given the structure of the Russian autocracy, he argued, it was entirely possible that a terrorist coup could trigger a revolution in Russia. Cautiously, however, he and Engels tried to remain aloof from the quarrels that beleaguered the Russian exile community, partly because they regarded Russian Marxists as hopeless sectarians. Engels tried, for a time, to heal the breach between the two camps. 'In the spring of 1892,' notes Bertram D. Wolfe,

Engels actually arranged a meeting in his home in London between the leaders of the two groups among the Russian socialist refugees, in order to unite Narodniks and self-proclaimed Marxists into a single party. But, what with the ardor of the Russian temperament in controversy, and the diffidence of Engels to intervene in a dictatorial manner, the plan fell through. Yet to Engels it seemed that it had failed only because these sectarians lived in the bitter 'night of exile', in isolation from a mass movement. Thus his last word on the Russian question was a gently urgent plea for the unification of the Russian Marxists and the Russian Populists.⁸

The reconciliation never occurred. A generation later, in 1917, amid a historical revolution of world-shaking proportions, the most radical *narodnik* tendencies actually made organic contact with the most radical Marxist tendencies, and each tendency might have nourished the other in producing a revolutionary program to satisfy the needs of Russian workers and peasants alike. But dogma and distrust—as well as circumstances—would drive a wedge between the two tendencies, once again bringing them into furious opposition—this time with shattering consequences for the Russian people.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Anatole G. Mazour, *Russia: Past and Present* (New York and London: Van Nostrand, 1951), p. 334.
2. Allan K. Wildman, *The Making of a Workers' Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 3.
3. J.H.L. Keep, *The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 6.
4. Henri Troyat, *Daily Life in Russia Under the Last Tsar*, trans. Malcolm Barnes (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1961), pp. 93-4.
5. Karl Marx, author's preface, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1906), p. 13. This translation retains the dialectical flavor of Marx's writing.
6. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1989), p. 24:425-6; emphasis added.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 24:426; emphasis added.
8. Bertram D. Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1961), p. 112.

CHAPTER 38 Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries

THE AWAKENING OF THE WORKING CLASS

In 1891–2 a disastrous famine swept over much of the southern black earth region, including Saratov and Tambov, ravaging at least seventeen normally highly productive wheat provinces. Crop failures encompassed an estimated half-million square miles, on which lived approximately 30 million people, claiming the lives of at least a million peasants from hunger and disease. The autocracy handled the disaster with characteristic ineptness: it not only continued to export cereals to Europe for a half year into the famine but even tried to prevent news of the famine from spreading outside the stricken area to the rest of the Russian people, with the result that little aid was forthcoming for months.

At length the government had no choice—it finally appealed to the public for assistance. The response was overwhelming. People from the cities, including distinguished writers like Chekhov and Tolstoy, personally made their way into the hunger-stricken districts, where they tried to help the starving peasants, and famine relief and medical committees were spontaneously formed to meet the vast emergency.

The small and dormant socialist movement, which had lived a mole-like existence for nearly a decade, began to stir and make its presence felt to a new constituency, especially among the informed middle classes, students, and—significantly—the growing urban proletariat. By the 1890s urban factories were seething with the kind of unrest that closely resembled the sentiments that had aroused Western European workers in previous decades. Nor were strikes confined, as they had been in the past, to Petersburg and Moscow. Major strikes now exploded in Riga, in Ukrainian cities, and especially in Russian Poland.

KRUZHKY, OR STUDY CIRCLES

Even as the Liberation of Labor Group in Switzerland was slowly winning over Russian students abroad in the 1880s and 1890s, Marxism slowly percolated throughout the Russian intelligentsia at home. Not only were Plekhanov's writings on Marxism published in Russia to considerable acclaim, reaching a wide public, but they attracted emerging and able young writers such as Pyotr Struve, A.N. Potresov, M.I. Tugan-Baranovsky, Julius Martov, and not least Vladimir Ulyanov, the younger brother of the martyred *narodnik* student Alexander.

Several factors made Marxism especially attractive to Russian intellectuals. By the century's end *narodism* had produced only meager results. Contrary to all *narodnik* expectations, the famine crisis of 1891–2 did not generate any major peasant uprisings. Not only had there had been no significant *bunty*, but with few exceptions the peasants had seemed to accept their fate with stoic resignation. By contrast, the huge industrial strikes of 1896 and 1897 in central Russia suggested that the industrial working class provided a new reservoir for social initiative and self-organization. These strikes, if anything, seemed to confirm the Marxist prediction that the future of a Russian revolutionary movement lay not with the peasantry but with the proletariat, however numerically small it might still be.

Another reason for the growing interest in Marxism was the rapid industrialization that Russia was undergoing. The 1890s saw the rapid spread of capitalism in key areas of the empire. In that single decade Russia's output of coal, petroleum, and iron tripled, and in the two years from 1898 to 1900 a clearly definable Russian working class rose from 1.3 to 2.1 million. In the 1890s the mileage of railroad track—a key index to a country's increase in commercial penetration—nearly doubled. The prediction, voiced by Plekhanov's *émigré* group—that the advance of capitalism in Russia was inevitable—seemed to be amply supported by reality, a fact that was not lost on radical intellectuals of the time.

Finally, the ground had been carefully prepared in the previous decade for a systematic theoretical approach to social problems. During Alexander III's repression of the 1880s young men and women felt a compelling need to acquire a basic theoretical knowledge to underpin their revolutionary impulses—certainly if they expected to become an effective force for social change. Marxism, which cautioned against mindless and precipitous action, seemed eminently suitable to meet this demand. Its growing literature made the study of ideas and strategies for social revolution a practical activity in its own right—a feature of Marx's works that nourished practice even as the new tsar's highly repressive reign tried to shut and bolt the doors to political action.

The need for a theory that served a practice did not go unobserved among the more thoughtful populists. It was espoused by Pyotr Lavrov, an associate of Marx, who as early as the 1870s had called upon Russian intellectuals to take the greatest pains to educate themselves in social theory and history, indeed in all fields of knowledge. His emphasis on knowledge and consciousness over mindless activism, spontaneity, and personal deeds was new to the young, heady world of Russian populism, which up to now had been accustomed to calls for immediate action. Revolutionaries, Lavrov argued, had the duty to educate themselves fully, all the more to impart to the people an understanding of the causes of their oppression, not simply to foment an ill-informed struggle against the autocracy and the gentry. Without studying the history of past revolutionary movements and the most advanced ideas of the day, Lavrov warned, Russian socialists would inevitably fail to achieve their high-minded but grossly untheorized social goals.

Lavrov's insistence on consciousness and knowledge brought him into sharp conflict with Bakunin and his anarchist supporters, who normally disdained any attempt to privilege theory. As Avrahm Yarmolinsky has described it, Bakunin's disciples dismissed the Lavrovist demands 'as an attempt, dictated by cowardice and sluggishness, to relegate the revolution to an indefinite future.'

The idea of placing so much emphasis on booklearning! . . . And surely the peasants needed no enlightenment. They lived by a traditional philosophy grounded on belief in equality, and hostility toward private property and centralized political authority alike. Undoubtedly they would be the first to get rid of the State. Hadn't the master [Bakunin] written: 'The Russian people are socialists by instinct and revolutionaries by nature'? All the agitator had to do was to organize their revolt.¹

Calling themselves *buntary*, or supporters of *bunty*, the Bakuninists preferred local uprisings, even failed ones, over well-planned insurrections, ostensibly because of their educational effect. What fatally flawed this primitivistic, anarchistic approach was the stark reality that ineffective uprisings gravely damaged the revolutionaries' credibility with the masses and often generated among the militants widespread demoralization that lasted for years.

By contrast, at the end of the century, Lavrov's emphasis on the importance of education provided highly rewarding results in the form of *kruzhky*, especially among the Petersburg working class. Despite all the obstacles they encountered, the Russian intelligentsia began to reach systematically into the new factories with effective messages and literature.

As we have seen, populist students had helped create workers' *kruzhky* as

early as the 1860s. By the 1870s Marxists too began to appear in factory districts, either working with or rivaling the populists. Not surprisingly, the two tendencies melded Marxist ideas of proletarian hegemony in the cities with the populist focus on the *obshchina* in the countryside. This combination might well have produced a fruitful socialist movement that was eminently suited to Russian conditions. Skilled, elite workers were often avid readers, even by comparison with members of the land-based gentry, with an insatiable eagerness for learning. Their literacy rates were extraordinarily high by Russian standards: over 80 per cent of the metalworkers and 90 per cent of the workers in the elite printing trades could read and write. They eagerly attended lectures and seemed to have a boundless passion for general knowledge. Richard Pipes's accounts of such workers are truly moving: the *narodovoletz* lathe operator I.V. Krutov, obviously a highly skilled worker,

was well read and endowed with a good memory; at the same time he disposed of not inconsiderable agitational talents. One could meet him almost every day in the 'workers' club' [the men's room] conducting debates on subjects of all kinds. Sometimes, before an unappreciative audience, he would unravel the theory of Darwin, causing consternation among his listeners: how could man descend from ape? Usually the public frequenting the 'club' would not hear to the end Krutov's argument: after attacking some weak point in it, they would scatter without waiting for a reply. ... While imbuing his audience with knowledge, Krutov was a changed man: he underwent a rejuvenation; he was ready to embrace and kiss anyone who shared his ideas or altogether anyone who understood him.²

Some workers spent almost all the income they could spare buying books and periodicals until, in one case, a worker proudly built up a library of a thousand books. Still others lingered in libraries after eleven or more arduous hours of work, painstakingly deciphering books that contained complex ideas, and even politely turning to nearby students for assistance. In the 1870s and 1880s these 'worker-intelligentsia' (as revolutionaries actually called them) pioneered study circles or *kruzhky* to explore almost everything from high-minded literature on ethics to scientific and political works. These *kruzhky*, in fact, were often formed quite independently of the radical intelligentsia, and schisms between the two along class lines and prejudices were often unavoidable.

Julius Martov, for example, was a Social Democrat who viewed the worker-intelligentsia, indeed workers generally, with enormous enthusiasm and zealously reached out to recruit them as participants in leading committees of the revolutionary organizations. But if some worker-intelligentsia shared

common beliefs with men like Martov and interacted with them ideologically and organizationally, most workers profoundly distrusted the socialist intellectuals. Suspicious and even hostile, they saw intellectuals as an alien and privileged social class that was likely either to use them for their own political ends or to abandon them in times of severe repression. Occupied primarily with their immediate economic problems, most ordinary workers tended to respond with anger when students and intellectuals tried to foist socialist ideas on their own self-organized *kruzhky*. All too frequently, workers newly recruited from the countryside resolutely supported the tsar, in the naïve belief that he paternally regarded them as his 'children'. They rebuffed revolutionary intellectuals who spoke ill of Alexander III or his heir, Nicholas II, and like the peasants during the 'Children's Crusade', even reported them to the authorities.

Moreover, most workers regardless of status had a quite practical reason for their wariness of intellectuals. The police often viewed study circles organized by ordinary workers as harmless efforts at self-improvement, but nothing was more likely to awaken their suspicions than the arrival of socialist intellectuals at workers' *kruzhky*, whose more fastidious dress, manners, and cultivated speech easily caught the attention of the ubiquitous secret police agents and exposed the workers' *kruzhky* to charges of political subversion.

Accordingly workers often formed their own *kruzhky* and prudently kept the revolutionaries at a distance. The tensions that emerged between the workers' circles and those established by the socialists often reached acute levels of intensity. It was not without difficulty that revolutionaries slowly broke down the workers' hostility toward them; indeed, for years workers either excluded socialist propagandists from their *kruzhky* or, when they needed them as guides, prudently invited them singly into their circles under well-controlled conditions.

By the same token, surprisingly, the socialist intelligentsia had its own reservations about workers. Despite their claim to be training 'Worker Bebel's', or proletarian socialist propagandists, socialist students and intellectuals were uncomfortable about admitting workers to their more sophisticated *kruzhky*, let alone giving them leading positions in their organizations. Status-ridden Russia did not make it easy even for Social Democrats to free themselves from ingrained prejudices against unsophisticated workers. The Russian proletariat, by comparison with the French and German, was extremely raw, and socialist propagandists were obliged continually to teach working-class participants in the *kruzhky* the fine points of reading, not to speak of doctrinal interpretation.

The first important group to break through the wall of mistrust between workers and intellectuals were the Jewish workers of Russian-occupied Poland, Lithuania, and the 'Pale' or Jewish settlement districts in southwestern Russia.

The Jews were among the most educated sector in the empire. Not only did they embrace socialism *en masse* but they provided the revolutionary parties with some of their ablest theorists and activists. During the quiescent 1880s Social Democratic *kruzhky* began to spring up throughout the Pale, and Marxists of Jewish origin such as Julius Martov had little difficulty in organizing them. In Poland and Lithuania—especially in Vilnius in 1893—Jewish workers already engaged in strikes that were often led by Marxian socialists. By the turn of the century, the largest and most successful workers' party in Russia was the Jewish Workers' League, or Bund, in whose formation Martov played an immensely important role and which soon became a mass organization modeled on politicized Western European trade unions.

If the theoretically oriented Marxists were occupied with forming *kruzhky* in these years, the action-oriented *narodovoltsy* were not far behind. The *narodovoltsy* and the Marxists functioned together in the same committees, occasionally even conducting joint *kruzhky*, promoting the same popular literature, and sharing similar resources for bringing literature into Russia. They published translations of Marx, Engels, Bebel, and other leading Marxists, as well as their own theorists, and some self-professed Marxist *kruzhky* even believed in terrorist activities. Indeed, until the 1890s, many Russian workers could not draw a clear distinction between the two socialist movements, and those who did seldom opposed their joint activities.

In the 1890s, due largely to the harsh behavior of the autocracy, Russian workers temporarily set aside their suspicion of revolutionary intellectuals. The government's repression of all agitational activity unlocked the workers' traditional mental and psychological doors and drove them into the arms of the revolutionary students and professionals. This marriage was caused in great part by the workers' need to gain the intelligentsia's assistance in matters of political agitation and education. The last decade of the nineteenth century, moreover, marked not only the end of one phase of revolutionary education but the beginning of a radically new one. From 1900 onward the need arose to move beyond the study group movement, or *kruzhkovshchina*, into consolidated political organizations that allowed for the national or 'all-Russian' mobilization of the proletariat as a class.

AGITATIONAL COMMITTEES

The first step in this direction came in 1894 when Julius Martov, who was infused with the experience of working with large masses of proletarians, introduced the Petersburg *kruzhok* to a highly provocative pamphlet by Arkady

Kremer entitled *On Agitation*, which had already been widely distributed in Minsk. The pamphlet produced an ideological furor among the Petersburg workers. *On Agitation* called upon the *kruzhky* to shift from secretly conducted propaganda to open agitation in streets and factories. Propaganda *kruzhky* were to be, not simply subterranean study groups, but agitational committees occupied with leafleting and systematically organizing the workers.

Moreover, erstwhile propagandists (commonly students) were now called upon to propel the masses into strikes, public manifestations, and hopefully outright clashes. They were asked to don workers' clothing, adopt proletarian mannerisms, and take jobs in the workplaces of Petersburg and other cities in the hope of inspiring militancy among the laboring masses, whether by means of strikes or street demonstrations. At great risk to themselves, these revolutionary agitators were expected to disseminate their literature among large masses of people and, where possible, barrage them with public speeches.

These demands, dangerous as they were, constituted a logical escalation of revolutionary activity. The *kruzhky*, although valuable in instilling the knowledge needed to guide revolutionary activity, were useless if they did not enter into the public domain. Sooner or later they had to become a living social presence and give tangibility to their ideas. If this step was not taken, they risked the possibility of becoming monastic retreats, not active social forces to change the world.

The challenge came soon enough. In May 1896 the St Petersburg textile workers downed their tools and went on a strike of unprecedented proportions in Russia, both in the number of workers involved and in its level of organization. The strike began when textile employers refused to give full pay to their workers—the textile workers were the lowest paid and most overworked in the capital—for participating in a three-day official holiday to celebrate the coronation of Nicholas II, the new tsar who had just succeeded his late father Alexander III. An estimated 30,000 cotton spinners and weavers spontaneously struck the plants—and thereby opened the gates of pent-up working-class resentment. From a mere request for three days of holiday pay, the strike demands escalated into a movement to reduce the workday from thirteen to ten and a half hours. The strikers also demanded monetary wage payments instead of company chits, and an end to the capricious fining of workers for real or imagined infractions. At a rally in the Ekaterinhof Park near the huge Putilov metalworks, the strikers formed what Richard Pipes actually calls a 'protosoviet' of a hundred representatives to formulate and press their demands.³

Throughout the two weeks that they remained off their jobs, the strikers showed an extraordinary degree of discipline. They abstained from drunkenness and acts of violence that would have easily provoked bloody Cossack and

police attacks. They prudently stayed at home instead of gathering in provocative crowds in the streets, and they established a well-organized network of representatives who maintained close contact among Petersburg's striking factories.

The textile strike aroused widespread sympathy not only in Petersburg but throughout Russia and even abroad. In England, Germany, France, and other European countries, workers took up collections to aid the strikers. Public meetings of support were held in many European cities. But the funds that the workers collected were not sufficient to sustain the 30,000 striking men and women—a problem that faced every self-contained general strike. Moreover, skilled workers in the strategic metallurgical plants of Petersburg, who were relatively well paid and already had a shortened workday, did not join in the strike. At length, primarily for lack of material resources, the workers were compelled to go back to the factories without any immediate gains.

Yet the strike was far from a complete failure. The government, pressured by another large strike of the textile workers the following January, was obliged to establish the eleven-and-a-half-hour workday. Employers were required to place limitations on child labor, to pay all wages in cash, and to fine workers only for a narrower range of infractions. Many of these improvements were honored primarily in the breach, to be sure, yet even so, the strikes had shown what workers, many of whom were illiterate semi-peasants and women, could achieve. The fact that the strikes were led by working-class militants suggested that hidden cadres of worker-activists had long existed within the plants, many of whom were probably trained in *kruzhky*.

But the influence of the socialists, especially the Marxists in Petersburg, on the strikes of the 1890s remains a matter of historical dispute. Were the strikes entirely spontaneous, the product of working-class initiative and self-discipline, in which socialist intellectuals played no role? Or did a lengthy period of socialist education in joint worker-intellectual *kruzhky*, as well as the important socialist literature produced before and during the strikes, contribute significantly to the strikers' élan and discipline? In fact, the best evidence supports the view that the Marxist intellectuals played a very important role in helping the strikers formulate their goals, sustain their morale, and above all act in a disciplined manner.

As Allan K. Wildman has written, the older intellectual leaders of the *kruzhky* were of immense importance in establishing the basis for the strong, self-conscious, and effective workers' movement that sustained the 1890s strikes.

Their brief agitational leaflets listing immediate grievances and demands were to a large extent substitutes for direct participation; they crystallized

the workers' mood and channeled it into co-ordinated action without exposing the Social Democratic leaders to easy observation by the police. The dramatic culmination of their activity in the general strike of textile workers ... seemed to confirm beyond all doubt the efficacy of the St Petersburg [agitational] methods and won for them imitators in all parts of Russia.⁴

During the strikes, the Marxists and *narodovoltsy* busily produced leaflets spelling out the workers' demands and urging them to behave in a disciplined manner. Once the strikes got under way, the socialist intelligentsia may well have been in continual consultation with striking militants, offering them advice based on their knowledge of workers' movements in the West.

Propaganda and agitation are interdependent and are both patently necessary. Obviously the weight they are given may vary in different periods: in a time of reaction or repression like the dark 1880s, when fomenting strikes and street actions was virtually useless and even foolhardy, study-oriented *kruzhky* were the best form of activity in which Social Democrats could engage without being wiped out by the police. By the same token, in periods of unrest, agitation clearly deserved to have priority over propaganda. But agitation alone was insufficient to consolidate the workers into an organized and informed social force, and the shift from propaganda-oriented *kruzhky* to agitational committees was not without problems: the proletariat was badly in need of its Russian 'Bebels', who could explicate socialist theory, together with agitational organizers who were able to create new activist committees.

THE FORMATION OF THE RSDWP

The awakening of the working class at the turn of the century impressively confirmed the Marxist emphasis on the proletariat's hegemonic role. Marx's systematic ideas, moreover, came very much into vogue. In contrast to the *narodovoltsy*, whose anarchic dispositions favored small-group activity, Marxists were committed to the formation of a national Social Democratic party based mainly on working-class support. This impetus gained crucial reinforcement from Germany with the fall of Bismarck and the legalization of the German Social Democrats, who had already had a mass following even while the Iron Chancellor held office. Now that Russia was industrializing, and strikes were no longer a rarity in Russian cities, the Petersburg, Moscow, and Minsk Social Democrats could hope that they too would be able to create an organized mass movement with a disciplined and politically sophisticated

working-class following, in contrast to the small, conspiratorial, clandestine groups typical of anarchism. By the 1890s the time finally seemed ripe formally to establish a Social Democratic party throughout the Russian Empire.

The first tangible steps toward achieving this end were taken by the newly formed Yiddish-speaking Bund, which had the material means for holding a fairly representative party 'congress'. Drawing upon its contacts and resources, the Bund convened an illegal congress on 13 March 1898. The Bundists, however, were eager to preserve their autonomy as a Jewish workers' organization within an all-Russian congress. Accordingly, their leaders made every effort to control the proceedings and steer them in a quasi-federalist organizational direction.

This 'First Congress' of the new Russian Social Democratic party was convened in Minsk, which contained a large Jewish proletariat, and its handful of delegates were not disposed to place any severe ideological and organizational restrictions on the wishes of the *Bundist* leaders. Actually nine highly accommodating delegates showed up, who claimed to represent the Bund, the Petersburg Union of Struggle, and *kruzhky* in Kiev, Moscow, and Ekaterinoslav. Nor did the new all-Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDWP), as it named itself, formulate a program. Rather, it adopted a soaring and general manifesto, stating the all-important Social Democratic position that the proletariat would have to make a 'bourgeois democratic' revolution in Russia because the domestic bourgeoisie was too weak and fearful of the working class to fulfill its own historical destiny. This meant that the workers, while leading the overthrow of tsarism, would have to be restrained from venturing beyond bourgeois-democratic limits by their own leaders and party.

With the formation of the party many Marxist and even semi-*narodnik kruzhky* were eager to affiliate with it, generally abandoning the name 'circles' for 'committees' to conform to the fledgling party's organizational ideas. Local Social Democratic periodicals appeared, and in a number of places local committees began to co-ordinate their *kruzhky* into loosely confederal Unions of Struggle.

The fledgling RSDWP elected a central committee of three members and selected the Kiev *kruzhok's* periodical, *Rabochaya Gazeta* (Workers' Paper), as its official organ. For its chief propagandist, it chose a rising star in Russian Marxism, V.I. Lenin (as Ulyanov now called himself), to edit a series of introductory propagandistic pamphlets. It dutifully selected Plekhanov's prestigious *émigré* group to represent it abroad. Its Russian organizational structure was extremely loose: the real power in the party, it was agreed, should rest with its constituent local committees, which in practice could ignore the Central Committee's directives if they regarded them as inapplicable to their local conditions. The Central Committee, in turn, was obliged to

consult with a party congress on all important issues that did not require immediate action.

The newly constituted RSDWP's initial influence among the masses however, was virtually nil. In fact, shortly after the congress proceedings came to an end, most of the few delegates who attended were rounded up by police. Almost everything that this shadowy congress created eventually had to be reconstituted later (at the crucial Second Congress of the RSDWP). Yet although the First Congress was hardly more than a formality, it gave a certain tangibility to the existence of a Marxist party in Russia that slowly attracted the interest and then the support of the growing number of committees that sprang up throughout the empire.

THE AWAKENING OF THE PEASANTRY

The late 1890s also saw a widespread awakening, after generations of dormancy, of the Russian peasantry. By 1902 and 1903 the accumulating burden of the redemption payments, combined with the increase in the rural population and the scarcity and high price of available land, had become intolerable burdens to many peasants, who often responded by migrating to the cities. Others looked longingly at the vast uncultivated lands that remained in the possession of the gentry. In some case, peasants simply took their scythes in hand and attacked the property of the gentry, especially in the Ukraine, the Volga, and the central black earth regions. Once again peasants staged *bunty* in numerous parts of central Russia, fusing as a potentially rebellious presence with the workers' movement in the cities.

By the early 1900s the authorities were obliged to deal with young peasants who, significantly, had never known serfdom's humiliations and were not likely to settle for a hapless and servile way of life. These wilful and increasingly militant young people were learning how to read and write and eagerly listened to radical new ideas. Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaya—one of the elders of Russian populism, a woman of noble birth who had taken part in the *V narod* movement of 1874 and spent twenty years in Siberian exile—astutely observed:

The first thing that sprang to my attention was the significantly greater extent of literacy and the desire of the more literate to read serious books in the hope of finding answers to their insoluble problems. . . . Next, one could not help noticing a greater independence of behaviour and, among the younger peasants, a deliberate ignoring of the gentry and the state

officials. . . . Moreover, there was hardly a single teenage girl, not to mention the lads, who had not been working away from home, travelling hundreds of miles to the south of Russia at harvest time, or to the sugar refineries of Kiev and elsewhere.⁵

Breshko-Breshkovskaya was not alone in her fascination with the changes in the countryside. Her feelings were shared by many Russian revolutionaries who believed it was crucial to win the peasantry—the great majority of Russians—over to socialism. These new *narodovoltsy* prudently settled into the countryside, where they found permanent jobs as teachers, physicians, medical assistants, agronomists, and *zemstvo* officials. Some of them were professionals who worked in schools, clinics, and the like. Here the new army of radicals patiently educated the peasants not only in reading, writing, and calculating but also in their basic human rights—and laid the groundwork, not for a new ‘children’s crusade’, but for a stable and persisting agrarian movement.

These *narodovoltsy*, more than any other socialist tendency in Russia, focused their attention on the problems of the agrarian village and spoke about social issues in a moral language that the peasantry easily understood. Moreover, they seemed willing to discuss those problems with a revolutionary élan that especially reached the young peasants, who were festering with anger against the regime in Petersburg as well as the local authorities.

THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARIES

By the century’s end, Russian populists could look with the same enthusiasm on the growth of their influence and ideas that the Marxists did during the previous decade. The Socialist Revolutionaries—or SRs, as many *narodovoltsy* began to call themselves—tried to meld the traditional *narodnik* assertion of Russia’s agrarian exceptionalism with the emerging realities of European industrialization and proletarianization.

But they were not converts to Marxism. Most notably, where the Russian Marxists attributed to the peasantry a regressive, petty-bourgeois, and even counter-revolutionary role, the Socialist Revolutionaries, with much greater insight, gave them a positive and decisive role in radical social transformation. Although they readily acknowledged the many limitations that the working peasant exhibited, as the Marxists emphasized, as a proprietor and a land-owner, they also insisted that he was a *worker*, not as a bourgeois of any kind. Unlike the French peasant, the Russian peasant—the *muzhik*—was not averse to the socialization or nationalization of the land, which in his words ‘belonged

to God' and not to any man. Indeed, the *obshchina* required that the land be distributed among individual households and redistributed periodically according to need. The peasantry, in short, normally did not claim to 'own' the land, let alone turn it into salable bourgeois property. Rather, it generally favored the periodic redistribution of the land according to the changing requirements of a village's families.

Not only did Russian Marxists display sovereign contempt for the *obshchina*, they considered the industrialization of agriculture by capitalism and the proletarianization of the peasantry by large bourgeois estates to be a historical pre-condition for a socialist revolution, to be followed by the nationalization of agriculture by a workers' state. Marxists, in effect, favored a highly rationalized and factory-like form of collectivization. As Victor Chernov, the foremost SR theorist of the day, later characterized their position:

By analogy with industry, the Social Democrats expected the same process of development in agrarian capitalism, but through a slower and more painful process. They expected the landed gentry to be transformed into modern large-scale landowners, creators of rationalized 'grain factories'. They expected to see the village broken up, the minority of the peasants transformed into petty capitalists, while the majority would become landless proletarians, the village branch of the industrial working class.⁶

By contrast, the SRs took a radically different approach: in their view, the *obshchina* constituted the nucleus for a future socialist society. As such, the *obshchina* might well make it possible for Russia to avoid a capitalist stage of development—with all the consequent ravages of capitalistic industrialization—and allow agrarian Russia to develop socialism independently of the course taken by the West. Traditional notions of *volya* and peasant ties to the *obshchina* resonated, they believed, with revolutionary demands for 'land and freedom' and 'the abolition of private ownership of land'.

Thus for SRs the peasantry's belief that the land 'belonged to God' and should be available to everyone who was willing to work it made the villages a highly promising social and revolutionary agent. Deeply ingrained in the peasant's psyche, this belief had a fervent moral, even semi-religious core; it was fundamental to the traditional notion of *volya*. To the peasantry, the gentry's imposition of property rights on a God-given resource—the village's 'mother', the land—was fundamentally *immoral*. Land pre-existed all social classes and should never be owned. It should only be used—a view that fused economic realities with moral sensibilities and gave an almost metaphysical revolutionary edge to the thinking of the worker-peasants who arrived from the countryside.

Finally, where Russian Marxists emphasized economic forces as the driving 'laws' of history, the SRs warned that this basically impersonal and abstract theory overlooked the dire economic and demoralizing consequences of capitalist development for the workers and peasantry and ignored an indispensable moral premise that inhered in the outlook of millions of oppressed Russians. Socialists did not have to 'bring' a collectivist morality to the peasant majority of the empire; they already had it. This morality also fostered a strong predisposition for voluntarism and direct action. In contrast to the Marxists, who disdained emphasis on moral categories, the populists insisted upon their centrality, albeit without denying the importance of economic factors in producing historical change. They believed profoundly in the moral character of their own demands: their movement sought not only economic fairness but also moral redemption. Populist ideas were repeatedly couched in strong ethical, even semi-religious terms and were inspired by an almost transcendental sense of justice and truth.

Thus the *narodovoltsy* often called their organizations 'brotherhoods', not merely *kruzhky*, and preached an organizational message of personal affinity expressed by dedicatory vows, fervent declarations of allegiance, and inspired initiation ceremonies. Their beliefs were sustained by a spirit of mutual sacrifice, a personal hatred of privilege, intense feelings of guilt (among upper-class populists) for the suffering of the people, and lofty sentiments of idealism. In contrast to the Marxists, who emphasized the 'objective laws of history' and 'scientific socialism', eschewing sentiment and ethical explanations for their beliefs, the *narodovoltsy* were greatly nourished on the subjectivism of theorists like Nikolai Mikhailovsky, who affirmed the importance of will and moral motivation.

The SRs' high esteem for the peasantry, however, did not blind them to the fact that previous generations of populists had failed miserably to win the countryside over to radical ideas or even diminish its traditional devotion to the tsar. Like many young intellectuals at the time, they were influenced greatly by Marx, and many of them acknowledged the importance of the proletariat in advancing the cause of socialism. Industrial workers appeared to be more acutely hostile to the tsarist regime than their rural cousins, and it was very obvious that they were more responsive to revolutionary ideas and activities. In the 1890s some SRs freely incorporated notions of proletarian socialism into their programs. Even decades before, as Pipes points out, the original Narodnaya Volya 'was so impressed by the surge of the industrial proletariat and by its response to socialist propaganda that, in its party program of 1879, it expressed the belief that the proletariat would constitute the vanguard of the Russian revolutionary movement.'⁷

But this was not the typical SR view. Many SRs simply considered both groups, the proletariat and the working peasantry (as well as the radical intelligentsia, especially students), to be indispensable to the success of a future revolution. Unlike Plekhanov and most Marxists, they could see no reason to discount the peasantry as a potentially revolutionary force. These 'neopopulists', as they were to be called—led primarily by Victor Chernov—essentially expanded the definition of words such as *workers* and *toilers* to include the working peasants—'toilers of the soil'—who cultivated the land to meet their families' needs, occasionally with the aid of a hired hand. Chernov in particular fell back on passages in volume 3 of Marx's *Capital* to justify his view that 'the workers' included non-industrial as well as industrial strata.

On the whole, however, the majority of SRs were ambivalently suspicious of Marxism as an amoral, industrial, and overly materialistic ideology that was alien to their outlook, and they adhered to the traditional populist view that the peasant and the *obshchina* were central to an ethical Russian radicalism that upheld spiritual ideals and *volya*, the unique Russian village concept of freedom.

THE FORMATION OF THE PSR

By 1900 all socialist tendencies in the empire were faced with the imperative of organizing and mobilizing resources on a broad national scale. *Narodovoltsy* had been forming their own small-group organizations for nearly two generations, but the awakening of the peasantry in the 1890s obliged them to establish a distinctly identifiable national party. Like the Marxists, they tried to pull their segmented organizations and supporters together into an all-Russian confrontation with the autocracy.

The moving force behind the creation of a functional populist party, however, was undoubtedly Victor Chernov, who established several populist 'brotherhoods' and even succeeded in convening a provincial peasant congress that provided the framework for an active, socialistic agrarian movement with a decidedly populist program. Chernov's incipient agrarian party was soon dispersed by police. After 1899 he traveled to Western Europe, making contact with various Russians in exile, including the quarreling Social Democrats in Zurich, and trying to mobilize their support for the creation of a quasi-Marxist populist party at home. Although a few assorted exiles were willing to give him a hearing, he was spurned by most of them. But Chernov persisted and traveled to Paris, where older *narodnik* exiles gathered around the most venerated living figure of Russian populism, Pyotr Lavrov, who enthusiastically

hailed his vision of a united movement. Unfortunately Lavrov died shortly after Chernov's arrival, but his funeral became the occasion for a new gathering of the most distinguished populist exiles and *émigrés* in Europe.

While still gathered in Paris, the Russian populists formed an exile organization called the Agrarian-Socialist League. As Chernov put it, Lavrov's funeral became 'the christening party of our Agrarian-Socialist League: the dear departed [Lavrov] was its invisible godfather.'⁸ The League adhered to a fairly orthodox version of populism that regarded the *obshchina* and the collectivist Russian peasantry as a direct common route to a truly socialist society. Yet it also supported 'broadening' the workers' movement. Its founding appeal declared: 'In view of the need to broaden the course of the revolutionary movement in general, and of the workers' movement in particular, by attracting to it the working masses of the countryside, the Agrarian-Socialist League has been formed abroad with the aim of aiding all comrades working directly or indirectly in this direction in Russia.'⁹

The mere decision to create a national party galvanized the populist movement throughout Russia. Many other groups besides the northern and southern organizations eventually had a hand in the formation of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (PSR) in 1901. When the Agrarian-Socialist League affiliated with the PSR, it finally legitimated the new creation as a party hallowed by tradition, which rapidly attracted isolated populist groups of various hues throughout the empire.

The PSR was centered in Saratov, a city, as we have seen, long noted for its lively populist movement. In fact, Saratov became for the PSR what St Petersburg eventually became for the Bolsheviks. At its first unified congress in 1905-6, the PSR adopted a basically neopopulist program and acknowledged *Revolyutsionnaya Rossiya* (Revolutionary Russia), a periodical edited and ideologically influenced by Victor Chernov, as its official organ. The PSR's central committee included the most venerable populists in Russia, but it also made room for populism's newly arrived young leaders. Reaching out through the empire, it established *oblast* or regional committees in the larger regions; *guberniya* or provincial committees; *uezd* or district committees; and where possible, *volost* committees (a *volost* being the smallest, most basic administrative unit in Russia, consisting of several villages). The local *volost* committees often had a merely nominal existence, particularly because they were continually being depleted by the arrest of their members.

Despite the burst of enthusiasm created by its official founding in 1901, the PSR grew slowly as a party; 'all the tiny rivulets of Populism were flowing into a single stream,' to use Oliver Radkey's metaphorical expression, 'as yet of no great breadth or depth, but already running swiftly.'¹⁰ Notwithstanding its slow rate of growth, for the first time a permanent, hopefully mass party had

emerged from the long, often unsteady stream of Russian populist groups, now strengthened by a clear identity and the outlines of a nationwide revolutionary organization.

THE PSR PROGRAM

On 29 December 1906, at its first nationwide congress in Imatra, Finland, the PSR adopted a program that clearly reflected the influence of Victor Chernov's neopopulism. The congress, which attracted 95 delegates, representing 51 local and regional party organizations, lasted five days, passing into the New Year from 1906 to 1907. Its main debates were over the contents of the program. Indeed, so preoccupied were the delegates with ideology that the debates continued well into the early morning hours of January 2. The congress closed with an enthusiastic ovation to Chernov, whom one delegate hailed as 'the young giant who has for five years carried on his shoulders the entire weight of the theoretical development of our programme.'¹¹

Typically, the program contained a minimum program that called for an end to the autocracy and the immediate establishment of a Western-style republic, freed of all the features of monarchism and feudalism, and fostering considerable autonomy for all nationalities. A free electorate was to convoke a constituent assembly to adopt a modern constitution. Trade unions and all working-class organizations were to be immediately legalized, a compulsory eight-hour day was to be instituted, and working conditions in factories were to be vastly improved. Church and state were to be separated in all aspects of educational and civic life. Freedom of the press, speech, and assembly were to be guaranteed, and a suffrage system was to be instituted based on proportional representation and to include the right to recall representatives and the frequent use of referenda.

Going well beyond Western constitutions, the PSR program demanded agrarian legislation that would 'socialize' all Russian land. By this the SRs meant not only that all large landed properties were to be nationalized but that their holdings were to be divided according to need among the peasant communes, thereby transforming the *chernyi peredel* from a hallowed custom into a legal stricture. Accordingly, each household would have the full right to cultivate its crops on a family basis—as families did in the *obshchina*—in a system predicated on domestic needs.

SRs were deeply preoccupied with the difference between the socialization of the land and its nationalization in a state-planned economy. What they called 'socialization' was very different from what Marxists usually meant. They

wanted to create, not an agricultural proletariat, but a *social* system of agriculture tailored to meet family and *social* needs. But the PSR never clearly worked out what kind of institutions (apart from the *obshchina* itself) would 'socialize' the land or, for that matter, the factories and other non-agrarian means of production.

The PSR's maximum program, on the other hand, was surprisingly similar to that of the Social Democrats. Both parties agreed that as the masses matured culturally and ideologically after a basically 'bourgeois democratic' revolution, they would move toward the full collectivization of agriculture as well as industry and abolish the *obshchina*'s household methods for land redistribution. Following the education of the countryside and the nationalization of the land, they held, food cultivation and land ownership could now be collectivized. Where the Russian Marxists called for a highly centralized state, the SRs were decidedly more decentralistic. As Oliver Radkey observes:

In opposition to the centralizing tendencies of many socialist parties, the SRs favored maximum decentralization. ... During the period of the minimum program the SRs were prepared to accept an abnormal degree of decentralization—even by their own standards—which they would be the first to rescind with the advent of a fully developed socialism. ... As to the local organs, the party might expect to win a majority in some of them well before it could hope to duplicate that feat in the country at large.¹²

Which raises the question of why it did not occur to the SRs to extend the basically *communalist* or *municipalist* orientation of its transitional expectations into its minimum program from the very outset of the dogmatically prescribed 'bourgeois' revolution, and simply call for a Russia of free villages, towns, and cities, all united into a network of confederations that would control the land and factories regionally. Such a political and economic structure was politically the most natural end toward which Russia, following its most rational development, was unfolding, and one that was eminently suited to a largely decentralized economy in the early twentieth century. But Marxist notions had infiltrated Chernov's thinking and closed his mind to the lessons of nearly a century of socialist experience. Ideologically at least, the PSR was really a Marxist party that tried desperately to meld populist theories with those that were emanating from Plekhanov in Geneva.

The PSR, moreover, retained the *narodnik* tradition of terrorist activity. Its Fighting Organization (initially independent of the party itself) undertook spectacular assassinations of high government officials as well as minor police infiltrators and agents provocateurs. Indeed, the Fighting Organization assassinated several major state officials, including a member of the royal

family. Nevertheless, the PSR leadership did not have a favorable attitude toward spontaneous peasant uprisings against the landlords' property. Like the Social Democrats, who regarded many *bunty* as immoral acts of plunder, PSR leaders were strongly committed to organized, party-orchestrated peasant uprisings. Village-planned seizures of land, crops, cattle, and machinery such as occurred in the countryside during times of social unrest filled these largely town-bred middle-class revolutionaries with dread. The leaders of the populist movement, notwithstanding their claims to represent the interests of the peasantry, placed their real trust not in the raw *muzhik* but in the sophisticated intelligentsia and, more generally, in the enlightened middle class as a whole. The 'ax and torch', which symbolized events like the *pugachevshchina*, were no less fearsome to Russian populists and Marxists than they were to the landed proprietors who lived so uneasily among the desperate 'dark masses'.

NOTES

1. Avrahm Yarmolinsky, *Road to Revolution: A Century of Russian Radicalism* (London: Cassell, 1957), pp. 186–7.
2. Quoted in Richard Pipes, *Social Democracy and the St Petersburg Labor Movement, 1885–1897* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 6.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
4. Allan K. Wildman, *The Making of a Workers' Revolution: Russian Social Democracy, 1891–1903* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 61.
5. Quoted from *Sotsialist-Revolutsioner*, in Maureen Perrie, *The Agrarian Policy of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 55.
6. Victor Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, trans. Philip E. Mosely (1936; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), p. 111.
7. Pipes, *Social Democracy*, p. 8.
8. Quoted in Perrie, *Agrarian Policy*, p. 29.
9. 'To Comrades in Thought and Deed' (1900), quoted in Perrie, *Agrarian Policy*, p. 29.
10. Oliver H. Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 53.
11. Quoted in Perrie, *Agrarian Policy*, p. 152.
12. Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, pp. 35–6.

CHAPTER 39 Bolsheviks and Mensheviks

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

Perhaps the most remarkable of the Russian exiles who kept this *émigré* world in a state of continual polemical ferment was the younger brother of Alexander Ulyanov, Vladimir (or Ilyich, as his close colleagues called him) Lenin.

Born at Simbirsk (later Ulyanovsk) in 1870 of a Volga German mother (according to recent scholarship, of Jewish ethnic origin) and a father of decidedly Kalmuck ancestry, the young Ulyanov came from a hard-working family of the minor governmental nobility. Lenin's father, a provincial public official, died early of a cerebral hemorrhage; Ilyich inherited not only his father's epicanthic Kalmuck eyes and high cheekbones but the physical infirmities that were to claim his life at the age of only 53. The Ulyanov family lived more in accord with the restraints of German sobriety than with the fervent spontaneity attributed to Russians at the time. Lenin's mother, Maria Ulyanova (née Blank), was a highly educated woman who knew German, French, and English fluently and imparted their rudiments to all of her children. She shared her love of literature with her family by reading aloud to them during the long nights of the Russian winter. Tidy and methodical in managing the household, she was, like many Germans in the Volga region, very progressive in her ideas, both socially and as a parent.

The young Ilyich apparently imbibed these traits from her. A brilliant student, he was permitted by the authorities to attend Kazan University, despite the handicap of being the brother of an executed regicide. But—always an object of official suspicion after Alexander's execution—he was expelled in 1887 for being a political 'troublemaker'. He completed his law studies at home, entirely on his own and was accepted by the bar. Like many of his fellow students, he became involved in revolutionary activity, initially as a populist and later, after 1889, as a Marxist.

Following his arrival in St Petersburg in 1893, Lenin joined the Radchenko circle, and after he met Martov two years later, the two men eagerly joined forces to establish the St Petersburg Union of Struggle for the Liberation of the Working Class, a name suggested by Martov and probably inspired by Plekhanov's Liberation of Labor Group. After the 1896 textile strike, in which the new group was heavily involved, both Lenin and Martov were among those arrested and sent into Siberian exile for three years, from 1897 to 1900.

Lenin was sent to the remote village of Shushenskoye, which by Siberian standards was nevertheless a very comfortable refuge that allowed the future Bolshevik leader to engage in study and writing. His wife Nadezhda Krupskaya, his closest comrade in the Petersburg *kruzhok*, was permitted to share his quarters in Shushenskoye, where she entered upon her role as his indispensable aide. Martov, by contrast, who had been arrested shortly after Lenin, was exiled to Turukhansk, in the far north, where he was obliged to spend his three years under very physically demanding conditions. Most likely Martov's exile was more rigorous because he was a Jew and a commoner, but their differing circumstances never produced any ill feelings between them, even after political differences eventually ended their close friendship.

During his years in Shushenskoye, Lenin's authorship of *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (published in 1899) earned him considerable prestige among Russian Marxists. The book was designed to deflate *narodnik* visions of the hegemonic role of the peasantry in the struggle against tsarism and to debunk the notion that Russia could bypass a 'bourgeois stage' of development. Using an enormous amount of statistical material, Lenin tried to establish that capitalism was already so well established in Russia that it precluded any prospect of making the Russian Empire into a populist haven. At the same time Lenin's extraordinary organizing abilities, which he used to establish and maintain contacts with important individuals and groups in western Russia, contributed to a growing influence that soon exceeded that of more venerable and better-known figures in the emerging Social Democratic movement, apart from renowned figures like Plekhanov and Zasulich.

Lenin normally formed his theoretical ideas slowly and methodically, only after serious thought and study. A notable feature of Lenin's mentality was his analytical keenness. Marxism had taught him to go to the root of a problem and follow its internal logic unrelentingly—a practice that made him an anomaly among most Russian intellectuals. Averse to lingering inconclusively over inchoate political discussions, Lenin would become so impatient with what he regarded as directionless chatter that he could easily antagonize his close colleagues with his refusal to discuss interminably. Yet Lenin could also be very charming, pleasantly ironical, and sincerely solicitous of the welfare of his comrades. Contrary to the image that he was a brutal man, the founder of

Bolshevism was initially more prone to act from kindness than from cold indifference. In later years the terrible civil war that followed the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution would drive him to acts of severe repression, but there is no evidence that he was inherently harsh in his personal dealings with people.

Lenin's thinking and behavior were guided by the conviction, based on compelling historical reality, that the bourgeoisie (be it liberal or reactionary) would never yield its social supremacy to the proletariat without an unremitting, often bloody struggle, and that capitalism could not be replaced by a socialist society without the stern leadership of a highly centralized party, composed of completely dedicated and disciplined professional revolutionaries. His strong commitment to a vanguard party was in large part a reaction to the historical fatalism that permeated many contemporary European Marxists—notably their conviction that, owing to the 'inexorable' laws of social development, socialism was a 'historical inevitability'. According to this very widespread and dogmatic interpretation of the Marxist 'laws' of history, the principal function of a workers' party was limited to the task of furnishing ideological assistance to the proletariat. The party, in short, would function as the most conscious custodian of the working class's 'inherently' revolutionary impulses—which would grow out of the conflict between wage labor and capital.

Lenin could not have been unaware of Marx's own statement in the Inaugural Address of the First International that the 'emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working classes themselves.' This 'line'—widely cited both by anarcho-syndicalists and by Marxists—did not prevent the founder of Bolshevism from insisting that the proletariat as a class could not be expected to rise above a mere economistic trade union consciousness. This pragmatic concept, more than any idea in Lenin's theories, lies at the core of 'Leninism', a thoroughly fabricated ideology that in all other respects is simply a revolutionary (as distinguished from a reformist) interpretation of Marx's writings. Capitalism and the everyday demands of survival, he believed, had locked the majority of workers into elemental demands for improved wages, hours, and working conditions—a level of consciousness, in Lenin's view, that was quite compatible with the continued existence of bourgeois society. All its militancy notwithstanding, the proletariat on its own could seldom, if ever, be expected to look beyond capitalism as a given social order, and left to itself, it would attempt to satisfy immediate piecemeal demands within the framework of bourgeois social relations.

To Lenin, then, it required 'professional revolutionaries', thoroughly trained in Marxist theory, to lift the proletariat beyond social conditions defined by capitalism, to advance from a struggle for the amelioration of its economic misery to a struggle for complete economic and social emancipation. Such

revolutionaries, it should be emphasized, were neither strictly proletarians nor middle-class intellectuals. They belonged to a new social stratum of their own that, like Chernyshevsky's 'new men', transcended bourgeois lifeways and tried to lead the working class to a socialist society.

Lenin's ideas on professional revolutionaries and disciplined organization were laid out in his booklet of 1902, *What Is to Be Done?*—a title appropriately borrowed from Chernyshevsky. Lenin's work provoked a sensation in Russian Social Democratic circles and became the foundational book in Bolshevism. Like so many of Lenin's writings, *What Is to Be Done?* is a decidedly polemical work, in this case directed against the 'economists' in Russian Social Democracy who were eager to emphasize everyday economic issues around which the working class could be mobilized. The role of an authentic Marxist party, in Lenin's eyes, was clearly and without equivocation to lead the masses toward socialism, not toward the mere amelioration of its enslavement under bourgeois social conditions.

That his argument would generate bitter disputes, Lenin all but took for granted. The epigraph to the booklet quoted a sentence from Ferdinand Lassalle in an 1852 letter to Marx: 'Party struggles lend a party strength and vitality; the greatest proof of a party's weakness is its diffuseness and the blurring of clear demarcations; a party becomes stronger by purging itself.'¹ This idea was to guide Lenin throughout his life. While disagreements at conferences and congresses were indispensable for the ideological development of the party, however, the utmost centralization, Lenin argued, was needed during interim periods, if the struggle against capitalism was to be effectively advanced. A central committee would take responsibility for formulating its day-to-day policies and see to their consistent execution. Capitalism had to be fought, in effect, on its own terms: by armed revolutionary means, pitting a proletarian 'state in the making' against the prevailing bourgeois state. This was a struggle that allowed for no quarter. It had to be fought by the party's central committee, like a general staff, supported, as in any army, by an infrastructure of disciplined professionals who guided a historically hegemonic social class—the proletariat. Thus, a truly revolutionary, coherent, and purposive Social Democratic (really a Communist) party, in Lenin's view, had to consist of people who were committed Marxists, class-conscious internationalists, and revolutionaries. The party had to be thoroughly unified by fundamental principles and by a discipline to which all members were unreservedly committed. Its press had to be the 'voice' of the party's central committee (although it could openly publish major disputes between opposing political factions and tendencies within the party itself).

Lenin's attempt to achieve an effective and disciplined party, however, came at a steep price. However much he verbally praised democracy, the future

Bolshevik leader tended to denigrate it as 'superstructural' and more commonly to dismiss his critics who made appeals to democracy as 'soft' or lacking in revolutionary zeal. This kind of language became so commonplace that it often tainted even minor differences among Lenin's followers and created a party atmosphere in which demands for internal democracy were viewed as alien to a Marxist outlook. (See, for example, Lenin's behavior at the Tenth Congress, in reaction to the Workers' opposition in 1921.) For Lenin, democracy was never an end in itself, a form of human and social self-realization. Rather, it could justifiably be sacrificed to 'higher', presumably historic, ends.

ECONOMISM AND REVISIONISM

But democracy was not to be the primary issue that confronted Lenin and the RSDWP in 1903. The most important issue was the emergence of a reformist tendency, of a kind that came to the forefront of most socialist parties in the 1890s, especially the German Social Democrats (influenced by Eduard Bernstein). These Social Democrats sought, not to organize a revolutionary movement, but to return to the 'good works' and reforms of the early populists under Alexander II and help workers resolve their immediate economic concerns. By shifting the movement's focus to immediate economic issues, they expected to expand the base of Russian Marxism. They did not exclude political activity, but they were essentially trailing the Bernsteinian tendencies that were then neutralizing German Social Democracy as a revolutionary movement.

In 1897 workers from groups in and near Petersburg joined forces to publish a new mimeographed periodical that would be free of any influence or control by intellectuals. *Rabochaya Mysl* (Workers' Thought) tried to voice 'pure and simple' labor concerns, often publishing reports about factory conditions and grievances rather than social analyses. During the four years of its existence, between 1897 and 1901, workers in the Petrograd area proved to be highly responsive to this reformist turn; they regarded *Rabochaya Mysl* as their own periodical and distributed it widely to fellow workers in the shops and plants of the capital.

What made *Rabochaya Mysl* particularly interesting to the workers was its wealth of information about immediate and concrete working-class issues. The periodical provided an outlet for the expression of practical grievances felt by its proletarian readers, concerning wages and working conditions. But it also showed that Russian workers, left entirely to themselves, actually exhibited

very little concern with analyses of the basic causes of their social problems, such as the existence of the autocracy and capitalist relations. The periodical was permeated by a narrow economic pragmatism that was decidedly more trade unionist and even syndicalist than Marxist. Editorially, the periodical vacillated between revolutionary Marxism and reformism, but the most widely read articles were closer to Eduard Bernstein's 'revisionism' than to Marx's revolutionary outlook. Its editorials also exhibited a marked bias against politics and theory.

In *What Is to Be Done?* Lenin sharply criticized *Rabochaya Mysl* for favoring the trade unionist tendencies and Bernstein-style reformism emerging in Russia. Immediate economic problems, he emphasized, could easily be resolved within the framework of the capitalist system, as was vividly occurring in Western Europe. Trying to reform the existing system, he insisted, would vitiate the workers' revolutionary spirit and their support, however vague, for revolutionary goals, while giving primacy to demands that would reinforce the workers' trade union consciousness.

It did not take long for other Social Democratic writers to follow the editors at *Rabochaya Mysl* and openly support Bernstein's ideas. Even leading Social Democrats—including the founders of Russian Social Democracy—expressed a measure of receptivity to the conclusions of Bernstein's revisionism. Axelrod and even Plekhanov, the 'father of Russian Marxism', were prepared to cede a great deal of theoretical ground to revisionist outlook. These leading Russian Social Democrats seemed to regard revolution as a remote goal, to a great extent irrelevant to their present social concerns. Lenin, by contrast, insisted on a firm commitment to revolutionary change. It is important to emphasize that the divisiveness that has been attributed to the future Bolshevik leader often stemmed from his recognition that seemingly minor differences could reveal serious latent divergences that had to be exposed and clarified. Indeed the problem of 'reform versus revolution', as it was usually called, would bitterly divide the party for the next fifteen years and remain a serious problem for the Left well into the twentieth century.

THE CREATION OF ISKRA

In addition to ideological disputes, organizational disputes divided the Russian Social Democrats as well, breaking out mainly around such issues as the functions and personnel of the party's official periodical. Since the 1880s, when early *émigrés* in Switzerland could barely have filled a small room, Russian Marxists had understood the need to create a center for their move-

ment that would mobilize and direct serious and committed Marxists, raise their theoretical level, and knit them together in a national party. But no one grappled with this need in so comprehensive, if often inflexible, a manner as Lenin. The nature of such a center may very well have been in his mind from the earliest days of his revolutionary activity. Following his exploratory four-month trip in Western Europe in the spring and summer of 1895, when he met and conferred with Plekhanov and Axelrod as well as other revolutionary *émigrés*, Lenin became aware that a Russian Marxist party could not hope to make any advances among the workers without some form of a guiding committee of trusted and convinced revolutionaries.

The first step in forming such a center, Lenin proposed, should be to create an editorial committee to publish a national Marxist periodical. Apparently the plan had entered his mind in 1898, during his Siberian exile, when he condemned economism and revisionism. Cutting against the Russian grain, he was resolved that Marxism had to be buttressed by a consistently Marxist organ that essentially controlled a top-down political party—views he shared with his closest friend, Julius Martov. The name of the proposed periodical—*Iskra* (Spark)—was chosen from a remark that a Decembrist had made to Pushkin: 'From the spark shall grow the flame.' Krupskaya later recalled that as Lenin's exile drew to an end in February 1900—that is, when 'Vladimir Ilyich had conceived [his] organizational plan' and the periodical—he began to champ at the bit with eagerness. Characteristically, he 'hardly slept at all, and grew terribly thin. He sat up all night, working out his plan in fullest detail. . . . He grew more and more impatient as time went on, eager to throw himself into the work.'² Letters in invisible ink and codewords were sent hastily back and forth from Shushenskoye to comrades who were privy to Lenin's plans, particularly Martov and Potresov—the 'troika' or threesome, as they called themselves. The three men selected the future editors of the periodical as well as its contributors and even the kinds of articles needed, as well as methods for its circulation.

When their exiles came to an end, Lenin, Martov, and Potresov fanned out over Russia, establishing personal contact with supporters of a center and a national newspaper. Potential *Iskra*-ists were carefully sorted out from 'soft' Social Democrats and were then invited to join the periodical's emerging network with a view, in the long run, to forming the cadres for a rejuvenated Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party. Lenin carried his message to exiles in Europe, meeting with Plekhanov, whom he still regarded as his teacher and mentor—and whose general support he received. But the younger man also encountered a serious problem. He had counted on the *émigré* group to produce *Iskra*, but Plekhanov, he found, had split his own Geneva group, taking the older veterans (Zasulich and Axelrod) with him and leaving the

younger members to dangle on their own. Plekhanov tried to dismiss his erstwhile youthful admirers as 'economists' and revisionists, but to Lenin, Plekhanov seemed motivated less by ideological differences than by pettiness and injured vanity.

An obvious division appeared among the six people who made up the board: the younger Lenin, Martov, and Potresov, on the one hand, and the old veterans—Plekhanov, Zasulich, and Axelrod—on the other. How to avoid deadlocked decisions between the two equally numbered sides? Astonishingly, on Zasulich's suggestion, the board agreed to give Plekhanov two votes, which guaranteed that his views would prevail. Then Plekhanov categorically refused to participate on the editorial board unless the others accepted this patently outrageous arrangement.

Plekhanov's behavior had a lasting effect on his most important disciple. In a tormented letter to the troika and to Krupskaya, Lenin spoke of the 'humility' that he had previously felt before Plekhanov, the extent to which he had been 'enamored' of him, his initial willingness to forgive his 'beloved' mentor, and the 'indignation' he now felt, which, as he put it, 'knew no bounds'. 'Young comrades "court" an elder comrade,' Lenin wrote in apparent pain, 'out of the great love they bear for him—and suddenly he injects into this love an atmosphere of intrigue.' His experience with Plekhanov taught Lenin 'to regard all persons without sentiment, to keep a stone in one's sling.'³ Although it would be simplistic to regard a single event as completely formative of a personality, Lenin's encounter with Plekhanov's vanity clearly shaped his attitude, to one degree or another, toward many of his future associates.

Thus the old affection that the younger members felt for their seniors gave way to a businesslike and increasingly wary relationship. Zasulich alone among the veterans was most deeply involved in *Iskra* and worked closely with the three younger members in Munich, where the earliest issues of the periodical were prepared and published. Zasulich, Martov, Potresov, and Lenin were the *de facto* editors of *Iskra* and consulted with Axelrod and Plekhanov mainly by mail. The affairs of the periodical were conducted very 'coolly', to use Lenin's word, while the old personal warmth between the former teacher and student waned steadily.

The first issue of *Iskra*, which appeared in December 1900, contained a very general statement of goals, titled 'Declaration by the Editorial Board of *Iskra*'. Written by Lenin, it opened with a description of the spread of socialist ideas throughout Russia, lamenting that:

the principal feature of our movement, which has become particularly marked in recent times, is its state of disunity and its amateur character, if

one may so express it. Local study circles spring up and function independently of one another and—what is particularly important—of circles that have functioned and still function in the same districts.⁴

After warning about the dangers of 'economism', revisionism, and the 'fashionable "criticism of Marxism"' that collectively 'push into the background the task of forming a revolutionary party to lead the struggle at the head of the *whole* people,' the statement issued a call for all Social Democrats to establish unity 'fortified by a unified Party programme.' This, the 'Declaration' argued, must be followed by the establishment of an 'organisation'

especially for the purpose of establishing and maintaining contact among all the centres of the movement, of supplying complete and timely information about the movement, and of regularly delivering our newspapers and periodicals to all parts of Russia. Only when such an organisation has been founded, only when a Russian socialist post has been established, will the Party possess a solid foundation and become a real fact, and, therefore, a mighty political force.⁴

In demanding ideological coherence and an enduring struggle against deviations from Marxism, the editors promised to carry on 'open polemics, conducted in full view of all Russian Social-Democrats and class-conscious workers.'⁴

The first issue also contained an unsigned article, 'The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement,' that warned the workers that they must organize 'not only in mutual benefit societies, strike funds, and workers' circles; but organise also in a political party; organise for the determined struggle against the autocratic government and against the whole of capitalist society.' It then declared:

We must train people who will devote the whole of their lives, not only their spare evenings, to the revolution; we must build up an organisation large enough to permit the introduction of a strict division of labour in the various forms of our work.

In short, the movement must cultivate the 'professional revolutionary', whose entire life and resources were to be devoted to building a vanguard party and who was prepared to sacrifice everything to the needs of the party and the revolution. The still-anonymous author—who was none other than Lenin—pledged that he would 'devote a series of articles in ensuing numbers to questions of organisation'—a pledge he more than amply fulfilled.⁵

Strikingly, Lenin's views contained a high degree of voluntarism that con-

spicuously departed from the simplistic determinism of many contemporary Marxists. Far from being a fatalist, Lenin was thoroughly imbued by a belief in the need for human agency in changing society, indeed often in direct opposition to the conventional Marxist determinism of the time. As J.L.H. Keep has observed:

It was plain that, for all his pious obeisances in the direction of Marxist determinism, Lenin was essentially a believer in the limitless opportunities open to the individual, if only his energies were properly inspired and directed. . . . What counted in politics, in his view, was the power of men and ideas. Never had theory been more important than in the present time of confusion: 'Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.'⁶

In this respect, Lenin was perfectly sound: without theory and leadership, the proletariat seldom rose beyond the level of a strike. The question was not, 'Should there be leadership?' but 'What *kind* of leadership should there be, and how should it be *institutionalized*?' Lenin's answer was to call for an organization based on 'strict secrecy, strict selection of members and the training of professional revolutionaries. If we possessed these qualities, something even more than "democracy" would be guaranteed to us, namely, complete, comradely, mutual confidence among revolutionaries.'⁷ Although denying that a democratic revolutionary organization was possible in tsarist Russia, where even independent trade unions were prohibited, Lenin significantly tried to make a virtue of necessity by deriding 'toy democracy'. The authoritarian implications of Lenin's plan became evident only when they were translated into a fully articulated party constitution, setting forth in some detail and in cold print the requirements for membership in the renovated RSDWP.

Even as he wrote up these plans, Lenin continued to maintain close contact with many *Iskra* agents, groups, and readers throughout Russia, especially through the efforts of Krupskaya, who meticulously dealt with all of the periodical's correspondence. By the time the Munich-based editorial board transferred its operations to London in April 1902, Lenin had already built up a sizable network of agents who were committed to his organizational views. Characteristically, he personally met with all agents who arrived at the *Iskra* offices, and he or Krupskaya gave them the instructions and advice they needed to spend their time in London. With his extraordinary attention to detail, he carefully calculated the degree of support he had within the party and *Iskra* network as well as within the periodical's editorial board. He painstakingly studied reports from agents, from supporters within Russia, and

from the *émigrés*. He managed the collection and disbursement of all finances; and he gave the most detailed instructions to the periodicals' distributors, creating a strong base of personal supporters within as well as outside Russia.

THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE RSDWP

The next step in forming a co-ordinated nationwide Marxist organization was self-evident: a 'second' RSDWP congress had to be convened. The 'founding congress' in Minsk in 1898, as we have seen, had been more of an *ad hoc* and symbolic affair than a reality, but the memory of its convocation was sentimentally incorporated into the party's annals. Now a new congress, it was widely believed, would be able to put the RSDWP on the firm and lasting footing that the 'first' congress in 1898 had failed to do.

But what kind of congress should it be? Could the Social Democrats simply issue a call for people who regarded themselves as Marxists to participate? In fact thousands of individuals, in and out of the *kruzhky*, who knew little about Marxism, regarded themselves as Marxists. Many populists, for example, considered themselves 'Marxist' in the sense that they regarded Marx and his works as basic guides to their activities and analyses—albeit as guides that carried equal weight with the works of Mikhailovsky and other 'subjectivists'. Other self-described 'Marxists' favored terroristic methods, the trademark of the populists and anarchists; and still others were even admirers of Bernstein and liberals like Struve, who had drifted away from socialism.

The Socialist Revolutionaries had been content to piece together a party with highly disparate elements—people who held vague ideologies and sentiments. To the *Iskra* Marxists—particularly Plekhanov, Axelrod, Potresov, Martov, and Lenin—the tendency to mingle half-formed populist with half-formed Marxist principles seemed dangerously obfuscatory. For them theory was a matter of the gravest importance; they planned to build their party around clearly formulated and coherent principles. They decidedly did not intend to reproduce in their midst the prevalently confused atmosphere in which contradictory ideas coexisted and sound ones were so divested of content that they would lead toward a tepid liberalism.

To Lenin in particular, with his concern for what he construed as the theories and practices of 'orthodox' Marxism, a free-wheeling congress would be intolerable, leading only to confusion and to debilitating compromises. Raw Social Democrats, whose ideas were still very hazy, had to be educated, and correct interpretations of Marxism (notably Lenin's) had to be fully explicated. A

network of basically like-minded Marxists was needed to elaborate propaganda and broaden the network of committees (or party-affiliated units) if a revolutionary workers' party were to be effective and preserve its revolutionary integrity.

Most of the *Iskra*-ists joined Lenin in supporting a centralized and disciplined Social Democratic organization. But others wanted the RSDWP to remain the loose decentralized party it had been—or professed to be—after the First Congress. The Jewish Bund especially wanted a federal structure that would give it cultural and structural autonomy, and the League of Russian Social Democrats (a group of *émigrés* alleged to be 'economists' by Plekhanov and his supporters) opposed a high degree of centralization. Finally, the young recruits opposed their elders' control of the new party and called for freedom from their personal constraints. Many debates over internal organization took on a nationalistic and generational character, with the Bundists and younger members making quasi-anarchistic demands for autonomy, at least from the central committee of the all-Russian party.

After much preparation and many preliminary meetings, the Second Congress of the RSDWP finally convened in Brussels in July 1903, amid an air of great ideological uncertainty. The 57 delegates who assembled in the Belgian city were patently not representative of all the self-designated Social Democratic committees in the Russian Empire. An unknown number of such committees were not invited to the congress at all, or else they scorned its convocation. Others lacked the resources to send delegates. Of the 57 who participated, fourteen were 'consultative' delegates who had a voice in the proceedings but had no votes; only 43 were regular voting delegates. Eight of those 43, including Lenin and Martov, had two votes each—one as *Iskra* editors and the other from a sympathetic domestic Russian group. Five votes were given to the Bund, three to the 'economistic' League of Russian Social Democrats, and eight 'irresolute' delegates came with ten mandates (primarily from the Ukraine). Taken together, the voting delegates totaled 51.

The congress was infiltrated by Belgian and Russian police agents, who carefully followed its delegates from venue to venue, absurdly trying to pick up bits and pieces of information by eavesdropping on them in restaurants and hotel corridors. But the delegates apparently made no effort to mute their discussions. After an inspirational opening speech by Plekhanov, followed by a tearful singing of 'The Internationale', the congress rapidly fell into a quarrel over credentials and was flooded with procedural denunciations well into the morning hours. Early on the delegates agreed unanimously to adopt a party program that Plekhanov had drafted in advance. The program was geared to a two-stage conception of a Russian revolution—a 'bourgeois democratic' revolution, followed by a socialist revolution—and accordingly it contained

two parts. The first, a 'minimum program', comprised the party's demands for the bourgeois phase of the revolution, namely the creation of a liberal republic with basic civil and political rights, including the legalization of trade unions and socialist parties, as well as a number of social reforms, such as the eight-hour day. The 'maximum program' contained the party's broader and vaguer goals for a socialist revolution.

By far the most divisive issue at the congress was not theoretical but procedural: it arose during a discussion of the definition of party membership. Lenin, for whom membership presupposed a serious, active, and responsible commitment, proposed defining a party member as one who 'supports the programme and supports the party both materially and *by personal participation in one of the party organizations.*' The closing clause of this definition was simply a demand for responsible participation: a member had to be *in* the party, as an active and participating agent in its actual work. But Martov modified the closing phrase to read: 'who gives the party his *regular personal co-operation, under the direction of one of the party organizations.*'⁸ Martov, in effect, was prepared to accept as members—with all the rights that membership conferred in the making of party decisions—anyone who simply agreed with the party's generally vague program, 'co-operated' with the party organ, and paid his or her dues regularly. For Lenin, these seemingly minor differences were in fact decisive, and his objection to Martov's proposal split the congress wide open. When the delegates finally voted on the two definitions, the majority (28 to 23) supported Martov's formulation.

It is highly unlikely that Lenin would ever have abided by this decision. As it happened, however, the Bund came to his aid by raising the question of its own status within the party: it stood entirely at variance with *Iskra's* insistence on the issue of a centralized organization. When it raised its demand for autonomy, the entire congress—even Martov, who had been one of the Bund's founders—rose in opposition to it, rejecting it overwhelmingly, 41 to 5. The five infuriated Bund delegates walked out, joined by two irate 'economist' delegates. All seven had previously supported Martov on the party membership issue. Their collective walkout gave Lenin a two-delegate majority for his organizational proposal, which he resubmitted and won by a narrow margin.

The walkout turned the congress around. Having acquired this memorable 'majority' or *bolshinstvo*, Lenin pressed his advantage so effectively that he virtually took over the congress. The new RSDWP constitution stipulated that a Central Committee composed of three members was to be given full responsibility for the party's practical activities in Russia, while the *Iskra* editorial board or Central Organ, as it was called, was authorized to provide the party with ideological leadership from the safety of emigration. Supreme control of the party was to be vested in a party council composed of two

members from the Central Committee, two from the Central Organ, and one elected by the congress—a total of five members.

After some unsavory maneuvers on Lenin's part, the new leader of the *bolsheviki* ('majorityites') decided to tighten the Central Organ in his favor by reducing its membership from six to three. Axelrod, Potresov, and the venerated Zasulich, all of whom had been hostile to Lenin's views, were simply eliminated from the editorial board. This reorganization left Plekhanov (who at the time supported Lenin), Lenin, and Martov as *Iskra*'s sole editors. Since Martov's 'soft' influence could be overcome by the votes of Plekhanov and Lenin, the Bolshevik leader had thus positioned himself to exercise control over the party's ideological organ.

Lenin achieved this outcome by means both fair or foul and at great cost to his friendship with devoted party comrades. In solidarity with the three ejected veterans, particularly Zasulich, Martov refused to sit on the *Iskra* Central Organ—which made Lenin's control over the periodical even more secure. Martov, who until the congress had been Lenin's closest friend, indignantly denounced him as seeking to be the party's dictator and portrayed himself and his supporters as the defenders of intra-party democracy. Their friendship was thenceforth irreparably destroyed. It was a rupture Lenin had not desired personally, and he usually spoke of his old friend with respect and affection up to the day of Martov's death in 1923, notwithstanding their furious differences over the years.

The Second Congress of the RSDWP, which was intended to produce a single national Marxist party in Russia, actually ended up creating two Social Democratic parties—the Bolshevik 'majorityites' and the Menshevik 'minorityites'. The first was held together by Lenin, often with an iron fist; the second, more collegial in character and more loosely structured, was ultimately to be guided in the end by the gentler and more empathetic Martov. Notwithstanding attempts to bring the two factions together, especially at the Fourth, so-called 'Unification Congress' at Stockholm in 1906, the relations between the two were always uneasy and by 1911 finally came to an end.

IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

Initially, the issues that separated the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks at the Second Congress were mainly organizational in nature. But these differences were rooted in a much deeper ideological split. Lenin was convinced that capitalism, for all practical purposes, was already the 'dominant' economy of Russia, in contrast to Plekhanov, who believed that it had yet to achieve so hegemonic

a status. This disagreement had immensely important consequences. If capitalism was already dominant, as Lenin maintained, then socialists should always interweave their 'minimum' with their 'maximum' programs and keep the creation of a workers' and poor peasants' revolutionary dictatorship at the forefront of all their goals—even goals that conventional Marxists would have called 'bourgeois democratic'. But if capitalism was not yet dominant, as Plekhanov argued, then a 'bourgeois democratic' stage would have to involve a prolonged phase of capitalist economic development in which Social Democrats were obliged to act merely as political allies of the bourgeoisie, subordinating themselves to the liberals, pending the full economic and political achievement of a 'bourgeois democratic' revolution. Plekhanov's position became the conventional wisdom of the mainstream Mensheviks in the years that followed, which essentially turned them into handmaidens of bourgeois politicians. Only a minority of the Mensheviks, led by Martov, eventually veered leftward toward a position closely akin to—but by no means the same as—Lenin's analysis. It would take years for these differences to become apparent to both parties, but they were present from the Second Congress onward and explain the contrasting organizational views held by Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

In the meantime, faced with arrests and deportations by the Belgian police, the Second Congress was obliged to move from Brussels to London, where it reconvened in a hospitable 'Christian socialist' church. The wrangling over theoretical and organizational issues continued for weeks until, out of sheer exhaustion, the congress petered out in the late afternoon of Saturday, 23 August. About three weeks had passed since the delegates enthusiastically opened their congress by warmly singing 'The Internationale'. It closed in considerable disarray, torn by conflicts that would take years to sort out and clarify.

Close friendships had been broken, former benefactors had cut off their financial support—usually bitterly remonstrating against Lenin's methods—and the demoralized delegates scattered to their respective homes. Attempts to patch up the differences between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks proved fruitless: the debate between the two 'factions' continued mainly in print. To Lenin, however, the congress was a blazing success if only because it opened and clarified issues without whose resolution a clearly defined Russian revolutionary movement would be impossible. Nor did he hesitate to use the label Bolshevik—the 'Majority'—to his fullest advantage, even when his party clearly constituted a minority within the RSDWP.

The Mensheviks, for their part, enlisted Kautsky and even Rosa Luxemburg against Lenin's 'disruptive' tactics. Lenin's association with Plekhanov did not survive the Second Congress; the older man considered his former acolyte to

be a follower of Narodnaya Volya and hence an embarrassing apostate. Lenin analogized his dispute with the Mensheviks as a fight between latter-day 'Jacobins' (the Bolsheviks) and 'Girondins' (the Mensheviks). In the years to come, this contrast would prove to be as troubling as it had been more than a century earlier, in 1793.

NOTES

1. V.I. Lenin, 'What Is to Be Done?' (Feb. 1902), in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1960), p. 5:347.
2. N.K. Krupskaya, *Reminiscences of Lenin* (New York: International Publishers, 1960), p. 45.
3. V.I. Lenin, 'How the "Spark" Was Nearly Extinguished' (Aug. 1900), in *Collected Works*, p. 4:342.
4. V.I. Lenin, 'Declaration of the Editorial Board of *Iskra*' (Sept. 1900), in *Collected Works*, p. 4:352, 354, 355.
5. V.I. Lenin, 'The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement' (Dec. 1900), in *Collected Works*, p. 4:370-1.
6. Keep, p. 90.
7. Lenin, 'What Is to Be Done?' p. 5:466.
8. Quoted in Leonard Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1959), p. 49; emphasis added.

CHAPTER 40 The Revolution of 1905: The Liberal Phase

THE LIBERAL OPPOSITION

By 1904 Russia had become a pile of tinder awaiting precisely the spark that would set the empire aflame. That spark came on 8 February 1904, when Japan—Russia's long-standing rival in the Far East for territory and raw materials—attacked Port Arthur, a Chinese coastal city that was at that time under Russian control. Although the attackers threw Russia on the defensive, the regime was confident that the empire would prevail over the relatively small Japan; her certain victory, moreover, would restore the tsar's waning prestige at home. Unknown to the regime, however, Japan had recently undergone a rapid modernization, and her military was well equipped and disciplined. The tsar's army, by contrast, was poorly trained, and its capacity to provision its forces were inadequate: the recently constructed Trans-Siberian Railroad, linking east and west over thousands of miles, comprised only a single track, one section of which was still unfinished.

Japan's quick and numerous victories in the Russo-Japanese War astonished not only the tsar but the world. Port Arthur fell in January 1905. In March, in a furious engagement that claimed nearly 90,000 Russian lives, Japanese forces pushed the Russian army out of Manchuria, capturing the strategic city of Mukden. The following May, Japan's modern navy crushed Russia's fleet in the Battle of Tsushima Strait. The autocracy's defeat at the hands of an ostensibly small power exacerbated all the civil conflicts on the Russian mainland. As its exhausted and mutinous army retreated from Mukden into Siberia, tsarism stood on the brink of a domestic crisis unequaled by any since Napoleon's invasion of 1812.

No section of Russian society was more acutely aware of this crisis than the

liberals, who looked for ways to contain the thoroughly irresponsible system of government and modernize the regime. Initially very diffuse, liberal opinion now consolidated into a definable spectrum of political views that ranged from cautious monarchists, who wished to curb the autocracy by turning it into a quasi-constitutional state, to virtual republicans, who hoped to emulate Britain's parliamentary system and hold the monarchy in check with legal and political restraints. To influence the events that were rolling over Russia, however, they needed an institutional base. In September 1903, after a series of preliminary meetings, Pyotr Struve, Pavel Milyukov, and other liberals led enlightened members of Russia's professional organizations and urban intellectuals in forming the Union of Liberation, an illegal organization that formalized its existence in January 1904. The Union provided liberalism with a broad underground organizational framework. In order to cast a wide net in its pursuit of influence, its leaders reached out to constitutional monarchists as well as potential republicans. Hence the organization was loose and its demands vague; it prudently sought a constitutional monarchy of sorts—not a republic—based on universal suffrage.

Another part of the liberals' institutional base were the *zemstva*, the district and provincial assemblies that had been modernized by Alexander II (see Chapter 37). *Zemstva* and their various administrative and statistical bureaus could be found in the 34 Russian provinces of the empire (excluding the borderlands and Siberia) and included representatives from cities, towns, and even peasant villages, drawing their members from non-noble as well as noble strata. The powers of the *zemstva* were markedly limited, but with the growth of social unrest their annual assemblies were a potential arena for exercising rights that the general public would otherwise have been denied. Although gentry dominated the *zemstvo* assemblies, many large landowners were becoming alienated from the autocracy and joined with discontented professionals in using the *zemstva* as forums for voicing their outrage over the persistent inequities of Russian society. Especially in the north where big landlords were relatively few in number, even the peasantry found a voice and a vote in assemblies.

Zemstva also encompassed various working and administrative boards, through which they remained an ongoing year-round presence. Many middle- and upper-class progressives regarded the *zemstva* as potential units of self-government that could well become the building materials for local and national legislatures. The Ministry of the Interior had the authority to veto any objectionable decision or action that the assemblies and boards adopted and frequently did so; but the government in Petersburg often simply ignored *zemstvo* complaints. Despite their limited powers, however, *zemstvo* discussions easily drifted from strictly pragmatic to quasi-political issues. Equally impor-

tant, the salaried men and women who staffed their boards—doctors, teachers, medical assistants, lawyers, agronomists, veterinarians and clerks—were often liberals and in growing numbers tilted toward radical, even *narodnik* views. Indeed, often deeply rooted in local life, they became the most actively progressive public servants with whom the Russian peasant had a trustful relationship and a potential pool of recruits for the Socialist Revolutionaries.

With the rising tide of demands for greater popular representation in government, the *zemstva* soon became a stepping-stone for the convening of a constituent assembly, and cautiously but persistently, liberal *zemstva* called for the creation of a national representative institution. As early as May 1895 *zemstvo* leaders gained permission from the interior minister to hold a *zemstvo* conference, which met in Nizhny-Novgorod in August 1896. But sensing the danger of parliamentary government, the autocracy banned a second conference that was scheduled for 1897.

To these few liberal breezes that might have rescued the autocracy from revolution, the tsar responded with characteristic fatuity and indecisiveness. As the Russian army and navy met with one defeat after another at the hands of Japan in 1904–5, *zemstvo* liberals tried to establish a national organization to aid wounded soldiers and provide for families who had lost their breadwinners in the conflict. But before he would permit it, the minister of the interior, Vyacheslav von Plehve—a man favored by Nicholas but detested by nearly all enlightened Russians for his malevolent anti-Semitism and reactionary policies—demanded the right to approve the men chosen for *zemstvo* offices. This demand the *zemstva* refused to concede, whereupon Plehve canceled the election of several of their chairmen. One of the men rejected was Dimitri Shipov, a spokesman for the moderate *zemstvo* constitutionalists. The Moscow board, incensed that Shipov's election had been canceled, defiantly chose in his stead Fyodor Golovin, a 'radical' liberal who stood to the left of Shipov politically. This affair opened a major breach between the *zemstva* and the autocracy, which served to isolate Nicholas II still further from his increasingly restive country, particularly the more enlightened members of his nobility.

On 15 July 1904, a few months after this crisis, Plehve was assassinated. Two years earlier his predecessor, D.S. Spiagin, had been killed by an SR terrorist. These two assassinations, coupled with the *zemstva*'s challenges, threw the monarchy off balance, and it embarked on a dizzying course of brutal repression mixed with belated concessions that succeeded only in bringing Russia closer to a revolutionary upsurge.

THE AUTOCRACY BELEAGUERED

While Nicholas lamented in his diary the death of his 'irreplaceable' friend Plehve, crowds cheered his assassin, the SR student Egor Sazonov. The contrast—Russia's supreme autocrat brought to tears by an event that elated his subjects—was so incongruous that even the dowager empress, Maria Fyodorovna, urged her son to appoint a more benign minister. After five weeks of uncertainty and delay, the reluctant tsar finally chose a new interior minister: Prince Pavel Sviatopolk-Mirsky, an amiable man known for his humane and relatively moderate views.

In the summer of 1904 Sviatopolk-Mirsky proposed a program of reforms that included greater religious tolerance, the removal of 'non-violent opposition' from the government's list of political crimes, and the return of a number of political prisoners from exile. Of paramount importance, Sviatopolk-Mirsky also proposed to relax the censorship and harsher limits on public expression. He even proposed to expand the autonomy of the *zemstva*. The moderates hailed these meager and rather belated measures as the arrival of a new 'spring'. A number of Sviatopolk-Mirsky's proposals were actually instituted: the harassment of *zemstvo* officials was brought to an end, and the press was given greater leeway in publishing mildly critical articles.

But Sviatopolk-Mirsky's concessions, far from pacifying the liberals, only whetted their appetites. The more he conceded to them, the farther leading liberals like Milyukov moved leftward. In September 1904, at a conference held in Paris, the Union of Liberation even joined a bloc of socialist parties—notably Socialist Revolutionaries, Lettish Social Democrats, Polish Socialists, and other minority socialists—in calling for a representative government based on universal suffrage and the right of self-determination for national minorities. 'No enemies on the Left' now became the slogan advanced by this coalition in its efforts to form a broad united front against the autocracy.

At the end of October the Union of Liberation met illegally in Petersburg and decided to mount a political campaign to replace the autocracy with a constitutional regime. It tried to gain the support of the *zemstva*, various progressive municipal dumas (or parliamentary bodies), and professional unions. Meanwhile on November 6, *zemstvo* representatives held a congress whose purpose was to address *zemstvo* problems and regain the rights that Plehve had taken from them, but like so many events initiated by moderates at this time, the congress's agenda got out of hand. Members of the Union of Liberation insisted that the congress make broader political demands, and the congress ended up adopting a political program—the Eleven Theses—that militantly called for full legal equality for all Russian citizens as well as full civil liberties. The program closed by demanding that the government 'summon

freely elected representatives of people so that, with their help, it can lead our people along a new path of political growth marked by the establishment of the rule of law and by cooperation between the government and the people.'¹

Following in the tradition of French liberals during the months preceding the 1848 Revolution, the Union next planned a series of banquets, during which various speakers, in the guise of dinner speeches, would make political presentations that called for a constituent assembly. On 20 November the Union launched the banquet campaign, which was an extraordinary success. Banquets were held in the larger cities of European Russia, where speeches called for a constitution and civil liberties. District *zemstva* and municipal dumas adopted resolutions supporting the Eleven Theses. Workers and labor unions participated, while demonstrators in Petersburg and other cities raised red flags and fought with police. A meeting of businessmen insisted that *zemstvo* representatives should be permitted to enter the sacrosanct meetings of the government's State Council.

These events created a crisis that Nicholas could no longer ignore—but the way the tsar chose to respond to the movement only worsened the situation. On 12 December he issued a carefully worded *ukaz* that instituted only a few mild reforms to ease public discontent, alleviating discrimination against dissident religious groups and loosening some controls over the press. This *ukaz*, together with later, equally inept efforts, brought him into a head-on collision with both the liberals and the increasingly radicalized workers.

'POLICE UNIONISM'

During these years the Russian secret police were hard at work trying to knit the workers ever more closely to the autocracy. In the decades since the early populists, the police had gained considerable experience in assuming a camouflaged leadership among political groups whose activities they were expected ruthlessly to suppress. The goal of this 'police unionism' was to actively enroll workers in police-sponsored welfare organizations that were actually in the service of the autocracy.

As early as 1898 Sergey Zubatov, a former revolutionary who had shifted his allegiances to the government, sent a secret memorandum to D.F. Trepov, the hated police prefect and governor-general of Moscow, urging him to establish police-sponsored labor organizations that could be used to counteract the influence of the revolutionary movement. Such organizations, Zubatov shrewdly suggested, should adopt policies that were similar to those of the 'economist' wing of the Social Democrats. Under their guidance, workers

would seek piecemeal economic gains, such as improved wages and working conditions, without challenging the authority of the state.

Having gained the tentative acceptance of Trepov and the then interior minister, Spiagin, for his plan, Zubatov managed to establish several government-controlled labor unions in Moscow. He had his greatest success among Moscow textile workers, organizing as many as 1200 in several mills. Ironically, workers were eager to join the police-controlled unions, precisely because they naïvely believed that they gave governmental legitimacy to their activities.

But the Zubatov movement, or *zubatovshchina*, soon found itself in a contradictory position: in order to gain significant influence over the workers, the organizations had to satisfy at least some of the mounting working-class grievances and look the other way, if possible, during strikes. Moreover, some workers within the 'police unions' were making far more provocative demands than Zubatov and the police could possibly accept—demands such as an eight-hour workday and even potential revolutionary demands like workers' control of factories!

Such demands brought the Zubatov organizations into open conflict with the employers. After an SR terrorist assassinated Minister Spiagin on 2 April 1902, the arch-reactionary Plehve, who had no interest in giving even minimal concessions to workers, occupied the late Spiagin's position. Zubatov-organized workers raised demands from a French employer, Jules Goujon, the owner of a Moscow factory, that went far beyond those permitted for a 'police union'. In reaction, Goujon called for curbs on the *zubatovshchina*, and in fact the government terminated the Zubatov organizations altogether.

In their place, with the collusion of Russian industrialists, the government tried to create a more traditional outlet for worker discontent by allowing them indirectly to choose so-called 'factory elders', or *stariky*. The *stariky* were expected humbly to bring the workers' grievances to management, which would paternalistically redress them as it saw fit. The workers, to be sure, would not be permitted to choose the *stariky* directly: rather, they would select several candidates, from whom the employers would choose the most suitable. This typically Russian semi-feudal system of representation failed miserably because the workers did not take it seriously and ignored their pre-selected elders.

Nevertheless, Zubatov refused to be stopped. To mollify this zealous police official, Plehve 'promoted' him to head the Special Section of the Police in St Petersburg, which also included the repressive anti-revolutionary Okhrana. Zubatov wrongly supposed that this 'promotion' was evidence of the government's support for his policies, and in the fall of 1902, now headquartered in the imperial capital, he proceeded to reconstitute his unions in Petersburg. Recruiting a former Social Democrat, one V. Pikunov, to help him establish

police-controlled labor organizations, Zubatov urged his new aide to get members of the clergy to support the 'police unions'.

This new approach brought Zubatov into contact with Father Georgy Gapon, a young priest who was both a fervent monarchist and a romantic social Christian. Gapon had been gaining a reputation among many influential circles as a champion of the downtrodden and especially the workers, whom he began to influence as a result not only of his own personal zeal but of the faith they placed in his special status as a priest. Indeed, Gapon seemed ideally suited to lead Zubatov's Petersburg labor movement.

Initially, Gapon was reluctant to place himself in Zubatov's hands. The police chief's sinister activities in Moscow were already well known in Petersburg; the Social Democrats, in particular, had given his earlier activities considerable negative publicity. Among the Petersburg workers, 'police unionism' had acquired an unsavory reputation, although within the Church, it was considered too radical to gain ecclesiastical blessing, and even Sergey Witte, president of the Council of Ministers, took pains to warn top clerics about Zubatov's activities.

Eventually, however, the two men seem to have reached an understanding. After a good deal of intrigue and maneuvering, Zubatov was able to establish a labor organization of sorts in Petersburg, which Gapon visited irregularly. In May 1903 (as Gapon tells the story in his autobiography) five workers approached him and urged him to join the Zubatov organization 'in order to capture it for our own use'. 'We met again at their lodgings, and after a long discussion I yielded,' Gapon recounts. 'Then and there we organized ourselves into a secret committee.'² Apparently Gapon planned to exploit the organizing opportunities afforded by the *zubatovshchina* without becoming Zubatov's docile instrument. Gapon was surprisingly open about his new relationship with the police, but he also tried to be as independent as possible of his official sponsors.

In mid-August 1903, as a result of the feud between Witte and Plehve, Zubatov was transferred out of Petersburg, leaving the unsupervised Gapon free to function as he chose. The cleric thereupon proceeded to discard the entire Zubatov organizational structure and build a new union, free of police influence. Using his religious piety, rhetorical abilities, and clerical garb to great effect, he proceeded to establish 'clubhouses' in all the districts of Petersburg, places where workers could assemble for religious, informational and moral instruction. Tearooms were established where members could relax and socialize (gambling and alcoholic beverages were strictly prohibited); indeed, as mutual aid societies, they established funds to provide for ill and unemployed members and their families, cover funeral expenses, and the like. Weekly *kruzhky* and other meetings were held, as the statutes put it, for the 'prudent discussion' of workers' 'general needs and self-education'.³ Club-

house members met in 'assemblies' and prudently opened meetings with prayers, due to police surveillance, but occasionally the workers dealt with political issues in very moderate tones.

Moreover, to retain their legal status, the overall ambience of the clubhouses was necessarily pious. The workers' goals, and their means of achieving them, exuded a moral, religious, and nationalistic uplift. They seemed to provide workers with a strong sense of their Russian heritage; their walls were adorned with icons and portraits of the tsar; and their libraries were stocked with patriotic books and periodicals. This approach had a special appeal to workers, many of whom were still infused with religious orthodoxy and a genuine devotion to the person of the emperor.

The clubhouses and their assemblies, in turn, were soon united as a formal organization under a weighty and patriotic name: 'The Assembly of the Russian Factory and Mill Workers of the City of St Petersburg'. The Assembly's seal included an Orthodox crucifix, both to validate its piety and to convey an impression of political innocuousness to the authorities. In late 1903 the Assembly officially adopted a set of statutes, stipulating its goals, membership qualifications, and the like. Great pains were taken to make the Assembly seem like a strictly recreational, educational, and cultural association, patriotic in outlook and religious in spirit, while its tone was entirely conciliatory toward the authorities. In short order the Assembly's statutes were even approved by the Interior Ministry, which thereby made it a legal organization duly sanctioned by the government.

At its height, Gapon's movement had approximately eleven branches, mainly within Petersburg proper and a few in the outskirts of the city. The branches attracted thousands of earnest working-class members—the commonest estimate places their number at 7000—with many more unregistered sympathizers. Gapon had personally installed himself in the Narva borough branch, where the huge Putilov shipbuilding and arms-manufacturing plant was located, making it the Assembly's largest and most influential clubhouse, indeed its semi-official center.*

* Gapon had discovered what many socialists and anarchists were discovering in Europe and the United States: the importance of establishing radical neighborhood centers where oppressed people could congregate, attend lectures, discuss, and study topics of community interest. Such centers appeared in the Spanish labor movement—the Socialists created *casas del pueblo* (houses of the people) and the anarcho-syndicalists *centros obreros* (workers' centers)—and in other socialist organizations at the turn of the twentieth century as well. These centers were identified by the political and social outlook of their proletarian clientele. As a radical civic dimension, their historical roots lay in the cafés of revolutionary France. Neighborhood centers have long faded from the memory of the revolutionary movement—at great cost to its future prospects.

As the Assembly swelled in numbers and influence, the politically naïve Gapon apparently began to fancy himself as a new Russian messiah who had been called upon to deliver the working class from suffering and oppression. He made passionate speeches condemning the injustices and ill-treatment suffered by the workers. A charismatic personality, he was revered by large numbers of Petersburg workers, whose apolitical outlook seemed to qualify them as good subjects of the tsar, but he was despised by the radical intellectuals who were trying to win the workers to socialist ideas. When Gapon focused on economic concerns, he normally larded his sermons with religious or spiritual expressions, prudently avoiding all political references; to all appearances, Gapon was simply a humanitarian priest, loyal to his tsar, his fatherland and the needs of the poor. His ideas seemed to resonate with the mentality of ordinary Petersburg workers, notwithstanding the common belief of many Russian socialists and anarchists that workers were imbued with innate 'revolutionary instincts'.

But in the politically heated year of 1904, when Russia went to war with Japan and even Russian liberalism seemed to be moving in a radical direction, no one dedicated to the interests of workers could have confined himself only to workplace injustices. Gapon was in fact influenced to some degree by the radical ideas of social change that were then prevalent, and fairly early on he made every effort to win over workers with quasi-socialistic ideas, who in turn would make his movement attractive to Petersburg's more politically serious workers—especially those in the metal industries.

In fact, Gapon's grasp of politics was simplistic. He understood a political idea only insofar as he could use it quite pragmatically to serve his immediate ends. According to I.I. Pavlov, although Gapon was a 'revolutionary', he 'could make any compromise in order to achieve his immediate goal, and this was his weakest point: he had no consistent outlook.'⁴ Thus Gapon flitted quite sincerely from one outlook to another, depending on its immediate practical value rather than its consistency.

Ironically, his failings served him well. His influence among the workers was a product not only of his clerical status but of his simple ideas and a capacity to talk to workers in a language they could easily understand, incorporating all the religious allusions that they were accustomed to hear from childhood, especially if they came from the countryside. The many workers who supported his movement, in turn, were not only persuaded by the content of his speeches but elevated by his manner of address and language. Gapon, a commoner, relied on moral injunctions more than reasoned explanations, often echoing ideas that worker-peasants had already heard in the villages from which they came.

BLOODY SUNDAY

The Assembly, in turn, became an organization of great personal importance to workers, who acquired a strong sense of personal self-worth from the humanistic and pious arena it provided. They felt that their lives could change dramatically for the better if only the sympathetic authorities in the government, particularly the emperor, could hear their complaints and simple aspirations. Clearly it was only a matter of time before the *gaponovshchina* would collide head-on with the industrialists in the capital and their supporters in the state.

Unknown to any of his followers, Gapon had privately prepared a program that made overtly political and economic demands that he had culled from Socialist Revolutionary and Social Democratic propaganda tracts. His program called for sweeping civil liberties, equality of all Russians before the law, the transfer of the land to the people, an eight-hour day, and a minimum wage, to cite its more important items. Had this 'secret program' become known to the government, it would almost certainly have suppressed his entire movement. Whether he wrote the 'secret program' only to gain the support of the socialistic workers or to express his deepest convictions—or both, as seems most likely—will never be known, but it crossed a line that turned his 'police unionism' into a potentially revolutionary labor movement.

Although the Assembly had earned the aversion of the revolutionary parties, small groups of workers who were either members of the parties or influenced by them also joined the Assembly (as Gapon in fact had hoped), although they too viewed Gapon's intentions—and his police history—with deep suspicion. They were led by Alexey Karelin, a skilled lithographer who had been a Social Democrat but left the RSDWP because he felt it was guided too much by intellectuals and failed to address the economic concerns of the working masses. Karelin's group had established itself as a separate caucus within the Assembly and met regularly in his apartment to study and formulate a socialist policy.

The Assembly also included several widely respected and critically minded socialistic workers who were not affiliated with any of the revolutionary parties: notably, Nikolai Varnashev and Ivan Vasilev, as well as Dimitri Kuzin, a Menshevik worker of independent views. Rather trustfully, Gapon, who greatly esteemed these revolutionary workers, decided to take them into his deepest confidence. On 4 March 1904, he met secretly with Karelin, Varnashev, Kuzin and Vasilev in his apartment and presented them with his hitherto-unknown 'secret program'. The four men read the document with amazement and responded enthusiastically. All five dramatically swore on pain of death to keep the document's existence secret; its contents were to be disseminated

only among very select workers who seemed politically prepared to accept its demands.

The four men with whom Gapon had shared the program, in turn, slowly began to draw radical workers into the Assembly and raise the level of discussions in the clubhouse. As Walter Sablinsky observes:

Karelin and his group gave the Assembly an undeniable stamp of respectability among workers dedicated to the labor movement and opened the way for attracting many who had previously avoided the clubhouse. From then on, Varnashev commented, the clubhouse 'brimmed with life'. . . . Sympathetic laymen offered to arrange lectures for the clubhouse; meetings became more lively; the scope of discussions broadened. In the gatherings of the leadership, debate centered around the 'Program-of-the-Five'.⁵

Surprisingly, the secret was amazingly well kept, and the police got no wind of the program or its contents.

By now, Gapon and his confidants were decidedly leading double lives. While the authorities were hailing the Assembly as a reliable support of the autocracy, the five men were prudently disseminating a 'secret program' among its more radical members that challenged the authority of the autocracy. The program now constituted the Assembly's authentic aims, notwithstanding the pious rhetoric that suffused so many of its discussions and its outward religiosity. This duplicity served the interests of all the members: that of the undeveloped workers who shied away from revolutionary parties, and that of the revolutionaries, who were shielded by the priest's outward piety and respectability. Nevertheless, it was only a matter of time before government officials and industrialists would begin to suspect that the Assembly was actually a radical trade union hidden underneath a priest's cassock.

During the summer of 1904 Karelin's socialist group, perhaps inspired by the liberals' petitions and military defeats in the Far East, tried to convince Gapon to prepare a labor-oriented petition in the Assembly's name. Gapon initially vacillated, but in November, after a disappointing meeting with progressive Petersburg liberal leaders, he agreed to launch the petition campaign. Assembly leaders, in turn, decided that such a petition should be presented directly to Nicholas by a well-organized demonstration of workers.

Although no specific date was set for the event, early in December 1904 a foreman in the Putilov's carpentry shop, one A. Tetiavkin, fired four workers who were also members of the Assembly's Narva branch. The foreman was particularly hostile to the Assembly; he was a member of a rival workers' organization that the Putilov management had established to countervail the

Assembly's influence. The factory's director, A.I. Smirnov, supported the firings and was determined to assert the authority of the Putilov works over the Assembly.

Gapon regarded the dismissals as a direct challenge to his movement. As many as 12,000 Putilov workers were members of the Assembly, but when the hated and intransigent Smirnov bluntly challenged the very right of the Assembly to take up the workers' grievances, this led most of the remaining *putilovtsy* to join the movement in solidarity with their dismissed co-workers. They appealed to factory management to reinstate the four dismissed workers and to the government to pressure the factory management, but to no avail. Their efforts exhausted, on Sunday, 2 January 1905, about 6000 *putilovtsy*, meeting at the Narva branch of the Assembly, voted to stage a strike the next day, demanding that the four fired workers be reinstated and that foreman Tetiavkin be dismissed.

3 January thus dawned portentously—with a complete shutdown of Russia's largest manufacturing plant. Approximately 12,000 workers left their benches for the streets. During the next week the strike spread throughout the capital, and more than 100,000 workers in as many as 380 factories left their jobs. The initial and modest demands of this unprecedented strike were now expanded to include an eight-hour day and an increase in wages. As time passed, in fact, the action escalated into one of the largest strikes in Russian history and brought capital and labor into a confrontation of historic proportions.

On 5 January, after the Putilov board of directors rejected a Gaponite delegation's attempt to settle the strike, the Assembly's branches openly conducted sessions to explore the 'Program of the Five' as the basis for a petition to the tsar. The next day, guided by the wishes of the workers in Assembly branches, Gapon redrafted the program into a petition and proposed that the Assembly organize a respectful public procession to deliver it directly to the tsar at the Winter Palace on the following Sunday, 9 January. The contents of the petition and the idea of a sober, working-class procession caught on at once: most of the workers in St Petersburg now agreed to participate in the march.

The government learned of the plan as soon as it was proposed and over the next two days deployed thousands of troops, cavalry, and police at strategic locations in Petersburg, posting a warning on 8 January that forbade all processions and gatherings. Military force, it stated, would be used against 'massive disorder'—although the Assembly expressly eschewed such disorders. The tsar and his family, in fact, were actually away from Petersburg, disporting themselves in nearby Tsarskoe Selo, but the flag that indicated that they were in the Winter Palace was still flying aloft, apparently overlooked by the palace authorities.

During the nights of 7 and 8 January the Assembly branches were abuzz with excitement. Thousands of workers who now associated the Assembly with the Putilov strike joined it or attended its branch meetings. Years later S. Somov, a Menshevik activist, recalled the excitement generated by the Assembly's local meetings. 'A kind of mystical, religious ecstasy reigned the whole time at the meeting,' he wrote; 'thousands of people stood side by side for hours in the dreadful heat and closeness and thirstily devoured the artless, strikingly powerful, simple, and passionate speeches of their exhausted worker orators.'⁶ Often tearful and touchingly sincere, these terribly oppressed people had collected into what was virtually a religious congregation in the hope of gaining some respite from their unfeeling exploiters.

On 9 January, to the ringing of Petersburg's Sunday church bells, masses of workers gathered at Gaponist Assembly halls in various parts of the city to carry the petition directly to the Winter Palace. The petition's tone was reverential toward the tsar, written in the manner of devout subjects, who were appealing to their 'father' for the redress of their grievances. 'Do not turn Thy help from Thy people,' it pleaded; 'Lead them out from the grave of lawlessness, poverty, and ignorance. Allow them to determine their own future; deliver them from the intolerable oppression of the officialdom. Raze the wall that separates Thee from Thy people and rule the country with them.'⁷ Decrying the scorn and maltreatment that workers suffered from management, the petition asked—'in accordance with God's laws' and emphasizing the hope for 'salvation' that had brought them to the 'walls of Thy palace'—for a declaration of basic rights, an eight-hour workday, progressive income taxes, equality before the law, compulsory popular education, and the election of a constituent assembly by 'universal, secret, and equal suffrage'—a demand that could only mean the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. The *gaponovshchina* had taken a qualitative leap forward, from a pious, apolitical, and limited economic protest to an explicitly political movement that, in the eyes of the authorities, was dangerously revolutionary.

Slowly, from their various starting points at the Assembly meeting halls, the workers' procession got under way. Estimates of the number of participants range from 150,000 to a quarter of a million. There was nothing defiant about the demonstrators' demeanor. Quite to the contrary: carrying religious icons, portraits of the tsar and the tsarina, and the Russian flag, the procession at the Narva branch set out first, led by a white-garbed Gapon carrying a cross, followed by similar processions that set out from other parts of the city and even from nearby communities on the periphery of the capital. As the solemn marchers passed, intoning prayers or singing hymns and the national anthem, bystanders and even traffic police respectfully removed their caps and made the sign of the cross.

When the Narva march reached the vicinity of the Narva triumphal arch—which Alexander I had erected to greet the victorious troops of the Napoleonic Wars—it was abruptly stopped by troops and cavalry, who had orders not to let the procession pass. After several cavalry forays the workers and their families, showing remarkable courage, regrouped to continue their march. The order to fire was given three times, but the infantrymen did not respond, so unexpected was the evident piety of the marchers. Finally several soldiers fired two volleys of shots over the heads of the crowd. A group of marchers fell to their knees and opened their garments to show they were unarmed and harmless. Another volley, directed point-blank at a group of pleading marchers, then went off. As marchers rushed toward the soldiers to beg them to lower their rifles, they too were shot down. More than 40 were instantly killed or wounded.

At Troitskaya Square two columns of demonstrators were stopped, then trampled on by cavalry. More rifle volleys were fired, leaving behind nearly 50 casualties. Further indiscriminate volleys followed as other workers' columns headed toward the palace. Many marchers, utterly disbelieving that authorities fired upon them, were determined not to stop and managed to make it by one means or another past the troops toward the square of the Winter Palace.

The largest contingents of troops and cavalry were concentrated at the Palace Square itself, as was the largest crowd, including well-to-do onlookers who followed the procession or simply stood by and observed it. As the square filled, people from already dispersed processions along the way brought shocking accounts of the massacres they had witnessed. To the ordinary worker-peasants in the crowd, it seemed inconceivable that the tsar would allow soldiers and police to shoot down his devout, unarmed, and loyal subjects. Stunned processioners knelt in humility before the Winter Palace, whispering prayers and respectfully raising religious icons before the imposing stronghold.

For many demonstrators that night washed away in blood their once-reverential faith in the monarchy and the protection that they were sure the tsar offered them. The order to shoot the marchers came directly from the commander of the Guard, Prince Vasilchikov. Having tried unsuccessfully to clear the square, the soldiers, who were free to fire at their discretion, indiscriminately mowed down men, women, and children, covering the whole area with dead and wounded bodies. Despite more massacres in the side streets, the stunned crowds still did not disperse until nightfall. Desultory shooting continued for several hours into the night, while the population, middle class and working class alike, tried to absorb the meaning and horror of the event. The entire capital was swept by feelings of shock and disbelief.

The number of people killed on Bloody Sunday was and remains impossible

to determine, even after nearly a century. The figures given by the Jewish Bund, which very carefully surveyed the available data, ranged from 960 to 1216. Soviet historians variously tallied the dead from several hundred up to a thousand. The foreign press reported that the shootings produced as many as 4600 casualties. The correct count remains unknown. No one took seriously the government's official figure of fewer than 100 dead.

What was important about 'Bloody Sunday', as it came to be called, was less quantitative than qualitative: for an incalculable number of workers, peasants, and even ordinary middle-class citizens, the autocracy had irretrievably lost its legitimacy. No longer was it easy to revere Nicholas II as the 'little father' of his suffering people who would tend to their needs, and no longer could innumerable Russians comport themselves as his obedient 'children'. Workers who had revered the emperor and the progressive public of all classes, which had believed at least in the basic morality of the autocracy, experienced the greatest shock. Outside of St Petersburg, the peasants were probably least affected by Bloody Sunday: it would take more than a shooting to dissolve their faith in the imperial tradition. But the autocracy had stained itself irreparably, and millions of Russians, upon whose goodwill the tsar's legitimacy rested, no longer revered him as their protector.

AFTERMATH OF BLOODY SUNDAY

Far from ending labor unrest in Petersburg, the massacre of 9 January produced a general strike in the Russian capital the very next day that spread to Moscow, where an estimated 30,000 workers downed their tools. Further strikes rolled out from both cities in consecutive waves, reaching Kharkov, Lodz, Voronezh, Mogilev and Saratov on each subsequent day, and finally by 20 January embraced nearly every major town and city in European Russia as well as major industrial centers on the empire's periphery, such as Warsaw, Vilna, Helsinki and Batum. Nearly half a million workers went on strike in January alone, exceeding the total number of strikers in the decade between 1894 and 1904. Neither ethnic nor geographic boundaries obstructed the strike's spread. The workers who downed their tools were often supported by students, teachers and even middle-class people who had never before taken to the streets.

Saratov, whose working class went on strike on the twelfth, verged on insurrection—troops had to be brought in to prevent the workers from seizing the railroad station. Riga was gripped by a general strike, during which 15,000 demonstrators openly defied the governmental authorities. There the protest

ended only when police and troops drove many marchers in a mass demonstration onto the thin ice of the Dvina River, causing 70 people to drown. As for the Poles, they were so unruly that additional troops were required to supplement the quarter million soldiers already trying to keep the country under Russian rule. In Lodz, the great textile-manufacturing city, fierce barricade fighting broke out between the population and army, lasting for four days and claiming 150 lives, according to official figures.

These strikes and uprisings were not ignited solely in reaction to Bloody Sunday. As Solomon M. Schwarz notes, they were actually a continuation of the workers' movement that had been increasingly active since the mid-1890s. Many of the strikes protested long-standing economic grievances, and when they encountered police and military repression, they became political in nature. Yet Bloody Sunday truly marked the beginning of the Russian Revolution of 1905. Before workers, liberals and revolutionaries could fully realize it, a movement for deep-seated social change was now under way in the empire.

Where ordinary workers had once trusted, even revered the tsar, they now removed his icon from the walls of their homes. They also became far more resolute and organized: factory committees emerged on the shop level in many industrial enterprises, initially as *ad hoc* organizations. During an early strike wave such committees took hold in Petersburg at the huge Obukhov metal-working plant, then spread to other enterprises in the capital. Finally, Bloody Sunday evoked a strong emotional and empathetic response from nearly all educated sectors of society. Liberals reacted to the massacres by escalating their own offensive to replace the autocracy with a constitutional representative regime, paralleling and intersecting with the labor movement's agitation. The lead in this middle-class mobilization was taken by the Union of Liberation, which had already veered leftward in the autumn of 1904.

Despite worldwide press condemnation of his behavior, Nicholas responded to the events of 9 January with characteristic indecision and incomprehension. He viewed the entire *gaponovshchina*—including the blood that his loyal petitioners had spilled on the streets and squares of Petersburg—as an act of scandalous impertinence arousing the contempt of even his close counselors. On 19 January, induced somehow to come to terms with the workers, the tsar stiffly met with a token 'delegation' of carefully selected workers, but far from attempting to fathom their needs, he imperiously announced to the workers that he 'forgave' them for their supposed malfeasances on 9 January! He thereupon vaguely promised that he would provide aid where possible, then enjoined them to inform their fellow workers of his intended munificence. This insufferable condescension reflected the tsar's vacuity: the last of the crowned Romanovs had neither the mental nor the

emotional equipment to perceive that his subjects were little more than misbehaving children.

The tsar then proceeded to appoint the detested General Dimitri Trepov as interior minister and hence head of the imperial police system. Trepov went to work as the virtual dictator of St Petersburg, cracking down on labor unrest, provocatively using courts-martial to suppress workers, peasants and revolutionaries, forbidding teachers to pass political resolutions, and closing down dining halls, dormitories, and finally all the universities in the empire, in order to end student protests. The few attempts at reform that the monarchy did make served only to fuel the workers' demands for their own autonomous labor organizations, a demand that was nurtured by the *obshchina's* strong collectivist traditions.

Finally, late in January 1905 Nicholas established a commission—chaired by one Nikolai Shidlovsky—to explore the causes of unrest among the proletariat. Petersburg workers were permitted to elect independent spokesmen from their factories—one for every 500—to be their representatives to the Shidlovsky Commission, as the new body was called. The delegates were elected with considerable gusto, often at heated mass meetings; even in the grim world of the heavily policed factory, the workers found that they could function with the same initiative that they had exhibited in the village *skhod*.

Even more remarkable, the results of the elections reflected the workers' new trust in the revolutionary militants. Twenty per cent of the workers' delegation were Social Democrats (mainly Mensheviks), while 40 per cent were unaligned socialists. Revolutionary socialists—in many cases the ablest workers in a factory—thus had a numerical majority on the body and openly insisted that they be granted full civil liberties and that electors who had been arrested for their subversiveness be released; otherwise, they said, they would boycott the commission's deliberations. But Nicholas could not have cared less: rather than make these concessions, the government simply dissolved the Shidlovsky Commission.

The Commission, however, was not forgotten in Russia's industrial plants and shops. For the first time workers had been permitted to flex their muscles and actually *select deputies of their own liking* to speak for their interests in a class-defined body. The process of finding leaders and electing them was an experience of inestimable importance in the development of Russian working-class organization. After the Commission was dissolved, the more militant workers continued to exercise considerable influence in the workplace—which would soon come to fruition in the form of workers' councils, or *soviets*.

NOTES

1. 'The Eleven Theses of the First Zemstvo Congress' (Nov. 1904), in Sidney Harcave, *The Russian Revolution of 1905* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1964), p. 281.
2. Georgy A. Gapon, *The Story of My Life* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1905), pp. 105-6.
3. 'The Statutes of the Assembly of the Russian Factory and Mill Workers of the City of St Petersburg' (Feb. 15, 1904), in Walter Sablinsky, *The Road to Bloody Sunday: Father Gapon and the St Petersburg Massacre of 1905* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 323-49.
4. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 127.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
6. Quoted in Gerald D. Surh, *1905 in St Petersburg: Labor, Society, and Revolution* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 161.
7. Quoted in Sablinsky, *Road to Bloody Sunday*, p. 189.

CHAPTER 41 The Revolution of 1905: The Popular Phase

During the spring and summer of 1905 the prestige of the autocracy plummeted to its nadir. The empire was seething with resentment and anger, and ever more voices were calling for a new social dispensation that would eliminate tsardom's egregious injustices. The revolutionary parties, especially the Marxists, awoke from their political torpor and inundated the workers with anti-war propaganda. A strike movement emerged, starting in the industrialized twin cities of Ivanovo-Voznesensk, issuing economic demands for an eight-hour day, a decent minimum monthly wage, and other basic improvements. What makes the strike distinctive in the annals of revolutionary history is that to manage their strike, these workers formed a *soviet* composed of deputies elected by proletarians from all branches of industry. In itself this council would not have been unusual, but the soviet soon became more than a strike committee. It assumed a variety of political and civic powers, fixing prices and organizing a workers' militia. The panicked employers and local government officials fled the two cities, leaving the populace almost entirely in the control of the soviet. This new polity comported itself as an orderly and responsible government, handling nearly all the local municipal affairs and even providing radical education programs, with lectures and readings. A parallel network of popular institutions emerged that threatened to preempt the traditional institutions of the tsarist state.

After ten weeks the workers and employers came to a mutually satisfactory agreement, and the soviet dissolved itself. But its very existence revealed a degree of political and administrative maturity on the part of the Ivanovo-Voznesensk working class and provided an example of self-government for workers in other cities. Bereft of all respect for the tsar, the autocracy, and the Church, radicalized workers slowly came to view the soviet as a new,

potentially revolutionary popular government, comparable to the way populists visualized the village commune, as distinguished from a bureaucratic state.

In the autumn Russia was jarred by often-violent strikes, followed by harsh repression, and growing tensions between the opposition parties and the regime. The Baltic and Polish provinces, indeed much of the empire's western and southern periphery, erupted repeatedly in violent uprisings, while agricultural laborers in at least fifteen provinces, including the Don Cossack region, waged uncoordinated but turbulent *bunty* against the landowners, cutting down timber and harvesting grain and hay. On 31 July to 1 August a secret assembly meeting near Moscow created a new Peasants' Union, which would soon be led by rural workers (teachers, lawyers, agronomists, *zemstvo* officials, and medical personnel) and other liberals. In its program the new Peasants' Union demanded not only a solution to the land question and a reduction of peasant debts but the convening of a constituent assembly and the nationalization of landlords' holdings.

Faced with this growing ferment, Nicholas again made a concession to his restless subjects. On 6 August 1905, the tsar proclaimed that elections would soon be held for representatives to a Duma that was to meet on 15 January 1906. This Duma was to be a strictly consultative body, which at most would provide preliminary recommendations to the tsar. The franchise for electing the representatives was to be drastically limited: property qualifications were set so high that not only the entire working class but many small property owners would be excluded from voting. And except for select non-Russian cities like Warsaw, Lodz, Baku and Tiflis, only Russia proper would be represented. Voting would be indirect—deputies were to be elected through the *zemstva* and municipal dumas, which would weight the Duma's composition heavily in favor of well-to-do rural and urban classes. Far from being the representative legislature based on universal suffrage that even liberals demanded, the Duma was certain to be a mockery of a parliament.

All the socialist parties opposed participation in the Duma and actively supported a boycott of the elections. But inasmuch as the Duma would allow for more representation than any Russian autocrat had ever previously granted, the question of whether to participate in it became highly problematical for the liberals. The Union of Liberation, the *zemstvo* movement, and the middle-class progressives were divided internally, but among most liberals support for participation finally prevailed. Fearful of depriving tsarism of its power to control 'the dark masses', the Constitutional Democratic Party, or Kadets, newly formed by members of the Union of Liberation, decided to strike a constitutional accommodation with the existing regime: they would accept a Duma that excluded the workers from participation in Russian political life.

This decision put an end to the liberal policy of 'no enemies on the Left'. Indeed, it led to a 'parting of the ways', to use Gerald Surh's expression, between the liberals and the revolutionary Left,¹ and leadership of the assault on the autocracy now passed from the liberal organizations to the revolutionary populist and working-class organizations.

THE OCTOBER GENERAL STRIKE

On 23 August Witte negotiated the Treaty of Portsmouth (August 23), bringing the disastrous Japanese war to an end, and nearly a million Russian soldiers on the Manchurian front began the slow return home. Many of the troops were reservists—generally, villagers from the central provinces—who not only hated the war but detested military life with its suffocating restrictions, poor rations, and endless personal humiliations. Characteristically, the various bureaucracies assigned to transport them back to their villages and towns, bungled the demobilization to a point that the first troop trains to leave the Far East did not depart until a full month after the peace treaty had been signed.

At the same time the railroad workers were becoming increasingly discontented. Not only did they form a strategic section of the working class, knitting the empire together through the rail transport system, but many of them—such as skilled locomotive engineers, repair-shop machinists, telegraphers, and signalmen—had skills that were in short supply in Russia. Collectively, they had a vital knowledge of the complex machines and operations that were absolutely necessary to keep the transportation system functional. Without their co-operation the entire economy, as well as the transportation of troops and supplies, could be brought to a dead halt.

In September 1905 the onus of demobilization fell entirely on to the shoulders of the railroad workers, who were already exhausted and infuriated by the many burdens that the war had placed upon them. Vague calls for a general strike began to circulate along the key railroad lines. In a moment of dizzying euphoria the liberal parties declared that they would support a general strike, if only to alert Nicholas to the fact that the country would plunge into turmoil if he did not grant the middle classes greater political freedom. Accordingly, the Ministry of Transportation and Communication decided to use a carrot-and-stick policy in dealing with the railroad men: when workers were too recalcitrant, the government threatened to conscript them into the navy—but it also decreased their working hours from the insufferable to the merely bearable. Finally, in a spirit of seeming liberality, the head of the

ministry, Prince M.I. Khilkov, called upon the workers to join him at a special congress in Petersburg on 20 September to review and hopefully resolve their most pressing grievances.

The Central Bureau of the Union of Railroad Workers, aware that the congress was merely a ploy to pacify the railroad men and distract them from their political objectives, took steps to see that delegates chosen by the workers were not notably radical. Almost simultaneously several events heightened the government's clash with the workers. On 20 September, even before the railroad congress convened, the Moscow printers suddenly exploded in a militant strike. Within ten days their strike became general, sweeping in the railroad workers—together with nearly all the different tradespeople in the old capital. On 4 October the workers on the Moscow-Kazan rail line, including the administrative employees, left their jobs, and day after day other lines radiating out of Moscow, the railroad hub of the empire, shut down until the country's entire rail transportation system was paralyzed. In fact, the tsar himself was now obliged to remain in his palace at Peterhof because no train would carry him the short distance to his palace at Petersburg—indeed, after five frustrating days Nicholas was finally obliged to use a ferry to make the trip.

The Petersburg printers, in turn, quickly decided to support their Moscow comrades with a three-day sympathy strike. They were soon joined by workers in the Neva shipbuilding works, in the city's Schlüsselburg district; they now walked out exclusively for political reasons—namely, in opposition to the forthcoming Duma. Before long the shipyard strikers were joined by the workers of the all-important Obukhov steel plant, who marched out of the mill singing the 'Marseillaise', boisterously demanding the so-called 'four-tail' suffrage: a voting system that was direct, secret, equal, and universal. Soon, virtually all the industrial workers of Russia had ceased to work, largely in support of the general strike. Industrial and transportation workers were joined by students (even from elementary schools), teachers, clerks from every branch of the economy, foremen, merchants, professors, civil servants, and on occasion liberal members of the bourgeoisie and nobility. Soldiers in a number of units, both in the east and at home, also went on 'strike' to protest against the abuses they suffered in the army.

In all, at least a million factory workers actively joined the general strike, as well as more than 700,000 railroad men, 50,000 government employees, and uncounted thousands of office and retail clerks, professionals of nearly all types, students, and service workers ranging from domestic servants to messengers. Even the most utopian of syndicalists could scarcely have envisioned the October General Strike of 1905, as it came to be called, in which the proletariat paralyzed a huge empire; nor had the modern

working class ever so clearly demonstrated the enormity of its power. Workers who had toiled quietly in the grim proletarian districts of the industrial cities suddenly emerged from their warrens to take their destiny into their own hands. By the many thousands they filled the great avenues of Russian cities, marching with red flags and singing revolutionary songs, battling with the unnerved police and indecisive troops, invading public buildings, ransacking shops for food, and holding mass rallies denouncing the autocracy.

The strike's demands varied from place to place. Many of them were economic in nature, such as demands for an eight-hour day, improved working conditions, and pensions. But strikingly, political demands were also common, notably for a constituent assembly, civil liberties, the rights of national minorities, and freedom for political prisoners. The socialist parties, especially the Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, and Socialist Revolutionaries, did what they could to radicalize the strike even further and were especially engaged in collecting weapons and ammunition. Lenin, who did not arrive in Petersburg until around 8 November, sent off urgent letters to his comrades on the scene, calling on them to prepare for a military uprising. That an insurrection was even possible for the Petersburg workers, who had little more than a few thousand pistols and a few hundred rifles among them, is doubtful at best. But Lenin was not only trying to turn the strike into a workers' insurrection; he was working zealously to drive the insurrection beyond 'bourgeois democratic' limits to a quasi-proletarian revolution with the support of the poor peasants—a doubtful alliance and one that stood in flat contradiction to current Marxian dogma. The Mensheviks, for their part, were focusing largely on democratic demands that would neither frighten nor alienate the big bourgeoisie.

The grassroots origins of the great strike movement has often left the impression that this tremendous force emerged entirely spontaneously. Close inspection, however, reveals that the preparations for it were actually long in the making. The *kruzhok* movement of the late 1880s and 1890s and the emergence of the worker-intelligentsia in almost all branches of industry was part of the preparation, as was the industrial workers' experience in electing representatives to the Shidlovsky Commission in February 1905. Finally, the creation of the soviet during the May–July strike at Ivanovo-Voznesensk had taught the proletariat how to organize a working governmental framework, not only for managing a strike but even for toppling the monarchy.

Collectively, these experiences bore fruit when the various factory committees were obliged to co-ordinate themselves into a united and effective body. From this rich human base soviets now emerged on a wide scale, ultimately taking root within at least 40 or more Russian towns and cities. In a

few rare cases soviets also emerged among the soldiers in the army and the peasants in the countryside, although they had only a transient existence.

THE SOVIETS

Like the soviets generally, the Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies (*Sovet rabotchikh deputatov*) arose during the October General Strike because various factory committees had to co-ordinate their common activities into a unified body if they were to render the strike general, coherent, and effective. In 1905 the use of councils was directly inspired by the Council of Printers in Moscow, whose 260-plus deputies from approximately 110 enterprises played a decisive role in carrying out the strike. But the most historic initiative was apparently taken by the Petersburg Mensheviks, who on 10 October called on the Petersburg workers to convene at the Technological Institute and form a 'General Workers' Committee' or, according to another account, a 'Workers' Council of Deputies'. By whatever name, the famous Petersburg Soviet was definitely created at a meeting of workers' deputies on 13 October at the Institute, mainly following the Mensheviks' appeal to the proletariat. Indeed, no mere strike committee could be considered equivalent to the soviet that finally emerged in the capital in October 1905. Strike committees were normally convened solely to carry out concrete strike activities and disbanded soon after the strike came to an end. But the Russian soviets of 1905, especially in Petersburg, became more permanent institutions. They were marked by all the institutional attributes of a governmental power based on mass proletarian and even middle-class support.

The original 40 members who appeared on 13 October at the first meeting of the Menshevik strike committee was soon augmented by 226 deputies from 96 factories, five trade unions, and the railroad workers' strike committee. Four days later the committee officially renamed itself the St Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies. Membership in the Soviet fluctuated greatly: at its peak in November, more than 550 deputies attended the Soviet's meetings from 181 enterprises, including sixteen trade unions. By far the majority of its deputies, 351, came from the metal trades, followed by 57 from textiles and 32 from the printing trades. But as J.H.L. Keep tells us, 'It seems to have been a simple matter for anyone who wished to attend to do so. The Soviet met in public—this was regarded by its supporters as one of its principal virtues.'²

Workers in large plants democratically and directly elected their deputies in face-to-face assemblies of the entire factory proletariat. Following the pattern of working-class representation to the Shidlovsky Commission, every 500

workers in a given enterprise were expected to elect one deputy in workers' meetings that were typically raucous—wildly applauding speakers whose remarks they favored and whistling or booing insistently at those they opposed. But in other respects order was remarkably well kept, and most speakers, however disagreeable their views were to their hearers, were permitted to express them fully. Despite the seemingly disorderly and earthy features of the meetings, the workers at the factory level held democratic procedures in high regard: once elected, deputies were obliged to give a full accounting to the workers of what was going on in the Soviet and how they had voted on various disputed issues.

The Petersburg Soviet's first chairman was a lawyer, George Nosar (generally known by the *nom de guerre* Pyotr Khrustalev). Khrustalev was highly respected for his legal support of labor causes and was apparently chosen because he was a non-party man. The vice-chairman, Lev Bronstein, known by the pseudonym Yanovsky, soon came to be celebrated under another pseudonym, Leon Trotsky. Trotsky at this time was too independent politically to be properly classified as either a Bolshevik or a Menshevik, although in party disputes he tilted toward the Mensheviks. A brilliant writer, an immensely gifted theorist, and a spellbinding orator, he had been courted by Lenin and, to a certain extent, by Martov during the Second Congress of the RSDWP. The 1905 Revolution brought Trotsky's immense talents into public view, at which point he became the independent personification of the Soviet's power for the rest of its existence.

On 17 October the Petersburg Soviet established a supervisory executive committee, with a total of 31 members, including two representatives elected from each of the city's seven neighborhood districts plus strictly advisory (or non-voting) representatives from the Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, and Socialist Revolutionaries. Later, representatives of the trade unions were added. Thus the executive functioned more like a steering committee than a decision-making body, although when clearly necessary, it issued directives in the name of the Petersburg Soviet as a whole.

Most of the Soviet's deputies were not affiliated socialists, but had a socialistic orientation, nourished by the obduracy of the tsarist regime. Among the deputies were even a small number of white-collar employees (mainly pharmacy clerks), as well as occupationally varied liberals, especially in Moscow. But workers formed the overwhelming majority of the Petersburg body. In fact, the workers seemed to regard the Petersburg Soviet as a proletarian parliament—and by directing the strike and fulfilling many civic responsibilities, it essentially functioned as one. People from nearly all classes of society—middle class as well as working class—were obliged to deal with it in everyday affairs—a fact that immensely enhanced its prestige. Not only did it

co-ordinate the activities of soviets in other cities by sending and receiving deputations to and from them, but it became a dual and explicitly class-oriented revolutionary power in opposition to the existing imperial government, which proved to be dysfunctional at the height of the Soviet's power. As the strike continued, the Petersburg Soviet's quasi-governmental authority expanded to include a number of the capital's practical affairs, such as setting the hours when retail stores could open each day, guarding property, maintaining order, attending to urban services, and seeing to the well-being of the citizenry. Industrial managers and storekeepers alike had to gain the assent of the council to do business in the capital, while commissions of deputies were formed to collect funds to sustain the striking workers and to acquire arms for a possible insurrection.

The source of the Soviet's power, above all, lay in its ability to determine if and when the transport and utility systems operated—and its ability to restrain overzealous workers from plunging the city into a premature and bloody uprising. It also provided reliable news for the public—to which end it published its own newspaper, *Izvestia* (News). As long as the workers could still act according to its orders, the Soviet literally ran the city; but neither the Petersburg workers nor their Soviet pressed for demands that went much beyond what Marxists would label 'bourgeois democratic'. The Soviet called for an eight-hour day, 'four-tail' suffrage, a popular militia to replace the police and armed forces, and a constituent assembly. All of these were demands to which the autocracy could easily have acceded if it had wanted to; indeed, none of them was properly socialist in nature.

THE OCTOBER MANIFESTO

Any intelligent monarch would have realized that workers could easily have been mollified with a European-style constitutional monarchy. But Nicholas II was not notable for his intelligence. In a letter to his mother, the dowager empress, Nicholas wrote:

It makes me sick to read the news! Nothing but new strikes in schools and factories, murdered policemen, Cossacks and soldiers, riots, disorders, and mutinies. But the ministers, instead of acting with quick decision, only assemble in council like a lot of frightened hens and cackle about providing united ministerial action.³

Nicholas's brief description of the crisis was not inaccurate, but true to form,

he at first tried to repress the strike, offering absolutely no concessions to his restive people. Troops were ordered to break up mass meetings—if necessary with live ammunition—and serious attempts were made to expel ‘outsiders’ (namely, assemblies of workers) from the schools. The order, however, could not be enforced. At length, Nicholas and his ‘cackling’ ministers collectively laid an egg. On 18 October they famously issued the October Manifesto, a dizzyingly liberal document that promised freedoms of speech, assembly, and association and vowed to establish a ‘new legislative order’, including a State Duma that was based on universal suffrage and whose consent would be a precondition for the viability of any law.⁴

Nothing like this manifesto had ever been promulgated in Russia, and for several days, from 18–21 October—the so-called Freedom Days—Petersburg and other cities were so euphoric that the strike movement began to wane. For three days joyous demonstrators, waving red flags and singing revolutionary songs, filled the capital’s streets. Delirious throngs gathered in public squares, schools, and key street intersections to celebrate the ‘new legislative order’. In the countryside, peasants gathered to petition the government not only for political reforms but for a *chernyi peredel*. In the central provinces, they even organized concerted attacks on manors and began forcibly to take over the land.

The more astute revolutionaries, however, knew better than to take Nicholas at his word. The Manifesto’s promises were unaccompanied by a timetable for their fulfillment. National groups were granted nothing whatever, and Nicholas still retained the executive powers of the state in his own hands, making the ministers responsible directly to him rather than to the Duma—a *sine qua non* for a modern constitutional government. Trotsky, addressing a huge crowd from the balcony of St Petersburg University, warned that the monarchy had as yet granted nothing concrete and that guarded mistrust was more in order than naïve credulity. But the crowd was either too eager to believe the Manifesto’s promises or too frightened to take on the conspicuously well-armed and disciplined forces that Trepov had concentrated in the capital.

Some liberals felt that the Manifesto had not granted enough to the incipient revolution, but others felt that with the Manifesto the revolution had gone far enough, and they did precisely what Lenin had feared. They deserted the general strike, definitively ending their former alliance with the workers. The indubitable leader of the Kadets, Pavel Milyukov, had no love for the soviets. He was committed to a bourgeois parliamentary form of government, and its achievement by largely peaceful means. The possibility that the strike might turn into an insurrection alarmed him. Especially after the October Manifesto, he decided to make his Kadet party into a loyal opposition to the tsar’s government rather than a movement for major social change.

Actually, Milyukov's fears of an insurrection in Petersburg were unwarranted—the strike movement was already ebbing. The Soviet, to be sure, still enjoyed considerable authority. When it demanded that printing establishments refrain from sending any copy to government censors, the employers, fearful of a printers' strike, assented. As a result, for the first time in her long history, Russia briefly had a free press. Moreover, workers put an eight-hour day into effect simply by instituting it in practice, mainly in the metalworking industry. On 29 October the Soviet insisted that employers and the government accept the *de facto* shortened workday for industry as a whole and, if they failed to do so, called upon workers simply to leave their jobs directly after eight hours of work.

But the general strike was seriously flagging in any case. For weeks the workers had been living on hopes for basic democratic change—and in the process had endured considerable material privations. They had idled the railroads and factories for the greater part of two weeks without any income to support themselves or their families. As Friedrich Engels had predicted decades earlier, a prolonged general strike would inflict greater damage on the workers than on the bourgeoisie, which had the means to withstand personal economic hardships, and soon the workers would be obliged to return to work. On 19 October, faced with this likely prospect, the Petersburg Soviet decided to terminate the strike. The executive committee saw that by calling off the flagging strike in a seemingly disciplined and authoritative manner, it could still appear to be in full control of its proletarian supporters.

The end of the strike was all the regime needed to reverse the course of events. A few days later it cracked down on the popular movement. During the last week of October the police, already reinforced with troops from the Far East and with Cossack patrols, vigorously attacked workers who gathered in the streets and broke up all public gatherings. Brutal gangs of 'Black Hundreds', the extremely reactionary groups that the monarchy had surreptitiously funded, roamed the streets spouting virulently anti-Semitic and monarchist slogans. Liberals, socialists, and particularly Jews were murdered in the many hundreds, especially in Odessa, where a bloody pogrom shocked the entire world. Students, identifiable by their uniforms, known oppositionists from every walk of life, and even individuals whose working-class dress and earthy behavior seemed to invite suspicion were openly assaulted and, in many cases, beaten to death. The police usually stood by indifferently—that is, when they did not openly join in with the gangs. Although a number of these actions may initially have been spontaneous, the authorities soon eagerly encouraged them.

Despite the repression, however, the eight-hour-day campaign continued. On 26 October the Kronstadt sailors and soldiers rose up, but the authorities

quickly suppressed the revolt and prepared to court-martial the 1200 arrested insurgents for violating military discipline, a charge that exposed them to the death penalty. Two days later, on 28 October, the regime declared martial law in Poland. Meeting on 1 November, the Soviet daringly called upon the Petersburg workers to reinstitute the general strike the very next day, 'to demonstrate its fraternal solidarity with the revolutionary soldiers of Kronstadt and the revolutionary proletariat of Poland.'⁵ It urged the strikers to demand an end to field courts-martial, the use of the death penalty, and the imposition of martial law everywhere it had been proclaimed.

For the second time the Petersburg proletariat exhibited an extraordinary capacity for action. On 2 November, in response to the Soviet's appeal, more than 112,000 workers took to the streets. A day later the strikers peaked in numbers at 119,000 and closed down 526 factories in the city. Considering that less than two weeks had passed since the materially debilitating October General Strike was terminated, these numbers were a staggering show of both working-class resolution and the Soviet's influence.

Most of the Petersburg workers were willing to stay away from their jobs for a limited period of time, but given their virtually depleted material resources, they could not sustain the strike indefinitely. The Soviet's plans would have had to culminate in something more decisive than a walkout—indeed, logically, in an armed insurrection. But such an insurrection could not possibly have succeeded in Petersburg, where the autocracy's troops remained impressively loyal to the government. The second strike showed signs of flagging after only a few days, especially among the railroad workers. Once again, to avoid losing its credibility and prestige with the public, the Soviet on 7 November terminated the strike in a disciplined manner.

But the tumult in Petersburg was not yet over. The eight-hour-day campaign continued, but now the employers felt more confident about repressing working-class militancy. Meeting on 7 November, the directors of 72 metal-working plants decided to lock out all workers who tried either to leave their jobs after eight hours or to strike in support of a shorter workday. Employers in other industries followed suit, until the Soviet estimated, with only slight exaggeration, that 100,000 Petersburg workers had been locked out by 13 November. 'The eight-hour-day campaign was a losing cause,' observes Gerald Surh, if only because it was 'atomizing the factory movement led by the Soviet into a series of separate struggles with individual employers in which the collective strength of the Soviet could not be brought directly to bear.'⁶ Indeed, before the campaign was called off on 13 November, it had divided the Soviet and its worker-deputies over what strategy to pursue.

On 26 November, sensing that the balance of power was shifting to the autocracy, Witte arrested the Soviet's president, George Nosar. The Soviet

could not hope to bring out the workers on a third general strike in retaliation; instead, on 2 December, it called upon all Petersburg citizens to refuse to pay taxes. To undermine the solvency of the banking and monetary systems, it urged Russians to withdraw their money from the banks and cash in their paper rubles for coins. As might be expected, the Soviet's appeal, called the Financial Manifesto, had only a minor impact on the economy and was quickly forgotten. Nosar was replaced by a more militant presidium that included Leon Trotsky, but the upper hand was clearly passing over to the side of the government.

The next day Witte, who by now had become such a vindictive counter-revolutionary firebrand, officially curtailed freedom of speech and proclaimed martial law in Petersburg, prohibiting strikes and all unauthorized meetings. To deliver a definitive blow against the Soviet, the minister sent troops to surround the building where that body met and arrested its executive committee, including Trotsky, and all the deputies that could be found. In so doing, Witte definitively lost whatever liberal credentials he had pieced together over previous years and irreparably damaged his capacity to gain the trust of Russian progressives, who had hoped to strike a compromise with him and the monarchy. An eventual revolution by the workers and the Left intelligentsia was all but unavoidable.

Within days of the suppression of the Soviet, an illegal alternative Soviet was formed of deputies who had escaped arrest, and of newly elected or chosen deputies who became substitutes for those in jail. This soviet was chaired by Parvus (Alexander Helphand), a close collaborator of the arrested Trotsky. Finally on 8 December, for a third time, the Petersburg Soviet desperately called for a general strike, and once again the Soviet's appeal brought out as many as 111,000 workers from 200 factories, attesting to the remarkable fortitude of the Petersburg proletariat.

But this last general strike was only a gesture of defiance, revealing the limits of syndicalism as a revolutionary strategy. It continued for a few days until 14 December, after which it collapsed from sheer exhaustion. The workers by now were too demoralized and hungry to confront Witte's aggressive government any further. On 2 January 1906, the illegal Soviet's executive committee was also arrested, and during the ensuing weeks and months police and troops rounded up its deputies. The Petersburg Soviet of 1905 now passed into history.

But it did not pass out of the memory of the Russian working class. The October General Strike of 1905 had compelled the tsar to consent at least to a semi-constitutional government. It had brought shorter hours to workers in many factories as well as other economic improvements. Lastly it showed that Russian workers had great staying power during the course of a struggle with

the bourgeoisie. Russian workers, in effect, gained a strong sense of their identity as a powerful class within the empire—a class that might one day bring the autocracy to its knees.

The Petersburg upsurge of 1905 above all provided evidence of the tactical promise of the general strike, but it had been brought to an end by the workers' dire material need. The strike alone had not been enough to overthrow the autocracy, let alone capitalism. Accordingly, the strategic question raised by Engels years earlier still remained: how could striking workers repulse a serious effort by the state to crush a strike? To gain victory in a revolution, a general strike clearly had to lead rapidly to an armed confrontation with the state—that is, to an outright insurrection in which the workers tried to take power. But not even insurrectionary workers could make a successful revolution, unless they gained the support of the armed forces. Those who failed to confront this searing reality were certain to succumb before the firepower of the military and suffer devastating reprisals in the end.

In June 1906 Trotsky and the other executive committee members were tried on charges of fomenting armed insurrection. Trotsky turned his defense speech into a brilliant indictment of the autocracy itself. His eloquence and intellectual acuity made his oration a landmark defense of Social Democracy. Together with fourteen other defendants, he was found guilty and condemned to lifelong exile in Siberia, but while he was en route to his place of exile, he managed to escape and make his way to Finland. There he met up with Martov and Lenin—both of whom received him very warmly—and thence to Vienna, where he was to remain for almost a decade.

THE MOSCOW INSURRECTION

In Moscow the general strike and subsequent repression actually led to an insurrection—indeed, to the most important armed uprising Europe had seen since the Paris Commune of 1871. Moscow had far more textile mills than steel plants, and far more craft and consumer-goods-manufacturing enterprises than heavy industrial ones. Economically this made the old Russian capital more like Paris than Berlin. Paradoxical as it may seem, as Abraham Ascher insightfully notes, Moscow also had a high proportion of white-collar workers, 'who because of their greater exposure to radical ideas were more easily captivated by the slogans of extremists than skilled workers.' Socialist militants were more likely to exist in greater numbers among educated workers, even white-collar employees, than among illiterate workers. As to the textile and

other less sophisticated laborers, they were so exploited that they 'felt that they had little to lose' by engaging in risky social actions.*

Due in great measure to their rural background, the Moscow workers in 1905 were more prone to engage in direct action than even their St Petersburg counterparts. Moscow workers participated so enthusiastically in the October General Strike that they nearly shut down the imperial government in the city, from the offices of the bureaucracy to the courts, utilities, and light industrial plants. But not until a month after the formation of the Petersburg Soviet did the Moscow workers create a soviet of their own. The Moscow Soviet met for the first time on 22 November with 145 deputies and elected an executive committee organized along the same lines as the Petersburg Soviet. The Bolsheviks played the most proactive role, making many decisions for the Soviet in their own party committees—but responding to Witte's repression with considerable hesitation.

Meanwhile, the soldiers in the Moscow garrison unexpectedly mutinied, for strictly practical reasons, namely their desire to be demobilized. To all appearances, in fact, two sapper battalions in the Moscow garrison as well as infantry and grenadier regiments seemed on the point of mutinying, and in both cases they even sent a representative to the Soviet on 27 November to express their support for a workers' insurrection.

But incredibly, the Soviet did nothing to respond to this appeal for collaboration. The Rostov grenadiers in particular were so disgruntled that they finally did mutiny on 1 December, just as the political situation in Moscow was coming to a head, and on 3 December they formulated a list of their grievances. Mostly, however, they centered issues of work and living conditions, with the result that the mutiny never acquired a political tone. Ironically, the Rostov grenadiers were hostile to the SR and Bolshevik agitators who came into their midst and attacked the tsar. Finally, on 4 December, the soldiers gave in to their commanders and ended their 'strike', as they chose to call the mutiny, and were followed by other dissatisfied military units.

Moscow labor organizers, however, seem to have been under the highly misleading impression that the Rostov mutiny had major political aims and thus began to act with a sense of power that they actually did not possess. On 5 December, workers' representatives of 29 railroad lines decided to

* Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 307. Considering the strata that participated in nineteenth-century insurrections (craftworkers and intellectuals), this may explain why the Moscow insurrection, extolled by Soviet historians because of Bolshevik influence, was given comparatively little attention by non-Communist historians of the Russian revolutions. Today Marx's fetishized 'blue collar' workers are no more radical than 'white collar' employees, as strikes and political movements in the United States currently reveal.

strike. During the same day a large meeting of Bolshevik Party—in concert with the Moscow Mensheviks—agreed that the Soviet should call a political general strike and try to turn it into an insurrection. During the following afternoon, on 6 December, the Moscow Soviet, led by the Bolsheviks, convened to approve a ‘general political strike’, as they called it, whose stated aim was to overthrow the monarchy and replace it with a ‘democratic republic’. The vagueness of this aim was good politics: it rallied a very large cross-section of Moscow’s population. A ‘democratic republic’, in the eyes of most Muscovites—including many members of the old capital’s middle class—was long overdue. Most of the 126 deputies, representing 91 factories, expressed their clamorous support, and some members of the Soviet’s executive committee were transformed into an insurrectional leadership.

Although the Moscow insurrection had a somewhat adventuristic character, the city’s factories and their delegates were clearly ready to take up arms to create a ‘democratic republic’, or at the very least resist the regime’s efforts to trample on so broad a struggle. Accordingly, the strike call was widely observed: on 7 December the Moscow workers shut down the city’s industry and suspended its municipal services. Most strategically, the railwaymen closed down all the lines leading out of Moscow (except for the crucial Nikolaevsky Line, which connected the city with Petersburg). An estimated 80,000 workers took to the streets. According to V. Zenzinov, a prominent Moscow Socialist Revolutionary, the insurrectionary workers felt that it was ‘better to perish in a struggle than to be bound hand and foot without a struggle. The *honor of the revolution* was at stake.’⁷

Prior to the insurrection, the Bolsheviks, following Lenin’s heady prescriptions for the arming of the workers, had actively engaged in creating a militia. By the first day of the strike the armed workers numbered about 1000 fighters, organized into small combat squads (*druzhiny*) of about 40 men each. Equipped with semi-automatic pistols, bombs, and a small number of rifles, they were supported by another 4000 workers and a large number of students who functioned as reserves. To all appearances the *druzhiny* were led by a Soviet-controlled Coalition Council of *Druzhiny*. During that evening workers acquired weapons by raiding police stations, disarming regular policemen, and breaking into gun shops.⁸

The government, for its part, suspected that attempts to suppress the coming Moscow uprising would prove very difficult, and it acted decisively. In November Witte appointed the forceful Admiral F.V. Dubasov as the city’s governor-general. Dubasov arrived on 4 December, only three days before the uprising began, and declared a state of emergency. The admiral had at least 8000 well-armed troops and police at his disposal, a force that was more than

adequate to crush the insurrection. But Dubasov seems to have doubted the reliability of his troops and withdrew nearly all of them from the city's streets lest they become politically contaminated by the insurgents. As a result, the city was left for a time almost entirely in the hands of the *druzhiniky*, which allowed the revolutionary militia and its student and working-class allies freely to roam Moscow's streets. The *druzhiniky*, supported by the largest general strike Moscow had ever seen, were careful not to antagonize the general population of the city, not even members of the bourgeoisie. Due perhaps to Dubasov's irresolution, the strike received a great deal of support from many members of the middle classes as well as the workers; indeed it acquired a remarkable transclass, truly populist character.

On 9 December the leadership of the insurrection decided to dissolve itself and, in keeping with its populist features, asserted that 'the local soviets must assume direct leadership of the struggle.'⁸ As a result, the insurrection assumed a decidedly libertarian form: the *druzhiniky* and their supporters were given the free run of the city. Insurrectionary groups were not even controlled by the district soviets that emerged in various quarters of Moscow but rather formed their own loose commands on an *ad hoc* basis. The *druzhiniky* commanders and the district soviets together became the sole publicly recognized governmental authorities in the city. In fact the revolutionaries made no attempts to take over the city as a whole or occupy its institutional buildings, with the result that the city's institutions were left in the hands of the imperial government.

This decision to follow a scattered guerrilla-like strategy instead may well have been reinforced on 12 December when more than 2000 railroad workers, aided by several hundred *druzhiniky*, engaged in a pitched battle (which they lost) to gain control of the Nikolaevsky Line, which linked Moscow with Petersburg. Thus between 7 and 9 December the insurrectionaries and the government were frozen in a standoff. While the *druzhiniky* controlled the streets, Dubasov cautiously refrained from deploying his forces and sent urgent messages to Petersburg requesting 'reliable' reinforcements. In the meantime the governor could not simply stand by and let the uprising continue. On 9 December he began to send out select troops to surround meetings, confiscate arms, and arrest their owners, while government dragoons patrolled the streets and engaged in sporadic forays against the crowds at open-air meetings.

Of all the confrontations at this stage, the most serious occurred during the night hours of 9 December at the Fiedler Academy, a Protestant school whose liberal director was sympathetic to the revolutionaries. Young *druzhiniky* had virtually turned the building into their headquarters, and that night it was hosting a meeting of the railway union, attended by as many as 500 people

and 100 *druzhiniky*. Around ten p.m. Dubasov's dragoons and gendarmes surrounded the building and demanded that the people inside surrender their weapons. If they complied within two hours, the officer in charge promised, the *druzhiniky* would be permitted to leave unharmed.

Meanwhile, reinforcements and artillery were dispatched to the site, and when the *druzhiniky* refused to comply with the order, the Fiedler Academy was assaulted with artillery. Muscovites saw this action as a scandalous, indeed excessive use of force in a municipal conflict. Faced with artillery fire, the *druzhiniky*, students, and railwaymen offered to surrender, but their offer was answered with further attacks. Finally the officers agreed to take the *druzhiniky* into custody, again assuring them that they would not be harmed, but as soon as the militiamen emerged from the building, troops brutally attacked them with sabers, to the outrage of the many ordinary citizens who were observing the whole affair from the sidelines. About seven students were killed, twenty more were wounded, and about 100 were jailed. Word of the government's treachery and brutality spread all over the city, and in retribution, on the evening of 10 December, SRs bombed the headquarters of the Moscow Security Police.

Finally the police and troops seemed to lose control over their behavior. The morning after the killings at the Fiedler Academy, huge protesting crowds filled the boulevards and streets of Moscow—to which the military responded by raking the streets with artillery fire. This event, too, was seen as an unprecedented action in a civil disorder that so infuriated Muscovites that many of them erected barricades at key intersections of the old capital. No class identities are discernible among these angry insurgents: the insurrection had widespread support not only among the workers but all sections of the middle and well-to-do classes, who were shocked by the needless brutality of the troops. As Laura Engelstein observes, '*Druzinniki*, concierges, workers, students, upper-class women, and even "gentlemen in beaver collars" gathered fruit stands, telephone poles, iron house gates, and other loose objects [to build barricades], which they piled across the streets every hundred feet or so.'⁹ In the Zamoskvorech'e district, behind the Kremlin, the barricade building took on a typically festive atmosphere. Writing later about the events of 9 December, the Bolshevik A.V. Sokolov observed:

The streets of Zamoskvorech'e had an excited, holiday air; crowds of people gathered on street corners in an attitude of expectation. Here and there they built barricades, less from considerations of strategy than from the need to find some occupation. The builders were mainly working-class youths, joined by an occasional solid citizen—artisans and shopkeepers could be seen dragging broken benches, two-legged stools, and other superfluous

household objects onto the altar of revolution. Cossacks were concentrated in the center of the city and did not appear. Police uniforms vanished. Simonovo [a district adjacent to Zamoskvorech'e] became something of an autonomous republic: the police evaporated, as they did everywhere else, and full power fell into the hands of the local soviet delegates.¹⁰

The Presnia district of Moscow, meanwhile, became a separate insurrectionary enclave. Some of the city's most important textile factories—and most resolute workers—were located in the area. On 10 December an unknown participant reported:

The streets overflowed with people. Many were just curious bystanders. But the majority of residents helped put up barricades. Old women, for example, dragged sleds and bed frames; concierges carried gates and wood. Throughout Presnia resounded the rumble and crash of telegraph poles and street lamps falling to the ground, as though an entire forest were being felled. Workers tore off house gates and piled them in the streets. Occasionally house owners and concierges tried to stop them, but they retreated when threatened by *druzhinniki*.¹¹

The local soviet had assumed full governmental powers in the Presnia district, and on 12 December *druzhiniky* took over the local police station. Thereafter, workers formed their own patrols to police the district: they conducted house-to-house searches looking for weapons and tsarist officials. A revolutionary tribunal was even established, but the sentences meted out were relatively mild.

Although workers formed its backbone, the Presnia insurgency earned almost universal respect from politically aware people in the district. Local residents offered the insurgents their restaurants and tearooms as gathering places and took over a hotel where the *druzhiniky* could sleep. A local psychiatrist gave the district soviet his clinic as a meeting place, and a humanitarian employer, N.I. Prokhorov, fed his embattled workers and provided them with meeting space. A sympathetic furniture maker, N.P. Schmidt, allowed his factory to be used as a center for the rebellion. This populist character of a seemingly socialist uprising, conducted quite publicly under red flags and banners, attests to the transclass nature of the entire insurgency.

Clearly the *druzhiniky*'s hit-and-run guerrilla street-fighting tactics gave the insurgents the initial advantage in an urban area; regular troops hunting for them often had no idea where they could be found. Small squads of four or five militiamen fired at soldiers from rooftops, windows, and building entrances and from behind trees and bushes, only to fade away when the

troops advanced upon them. Soldiers were never certain what to expect as they moved cautiously through the streets and boulevards. Troops became so jittery that they often fired on harmless individuals and groups of people—which served to turn nearly all the remaining ordinary citizens, except for staunch monarchists, against them.

As scattered army patrols approached the barricades, the *druzhiniky* would snipe at them—only to retreat just before the military could arrive and take them in force. When the troops finally did reach a barricade, they would find nothing to ‘capture’ but furniture and overturned vehicles. They would simply destroy the barricade and leave, but soon afterward the population would spontaneously rebuild them as evidence that the neighborhood or district was still in rebel hands. These tactics produced widespread disarray among the attacking soldiers. With bullets coming at them from every side, the soldiers assumed that their opponents were better armed than was actually the case. Having already been exhausted by service in the Russo-Japanese war, it is surprising that the troops did not mutiny against their officers then and there—so deeply imprinted was their obedience to state authority.

On 10 and 11 December the *druzhiniky* were still holding their own against Dubasov’s forces, so that, in Keep’s view, ‘it could truly be said that the outcome of the struggle hung in the balance.’¹² Had the insurgents been guided by an overall plan, Moscow might very well have fallen to them, although they could not have held the city very long without a similar victory in Petersburg or a widespread mutiny of troops (as would happen in 1917). The *druzhiniky* had no leadership to plan their moves, while Dubasov, who had sent for more troops, had only to await their arrival. The autocracy had issued orders that the insurgency should be put down mercilessly—indeed, in their readiness to shed the people’s blood, Nicholas and his ministers were of a single mind. The soldiers, whose courage was pumped up with generous quantities of vodka, were now only too ready to oblige the authorities. As Christmas, a very sentimental Russian holiday, drew closer, many insurgent workers simply left Moscow and returned to their villages to be with their families.

Dubasov now began systematically to use artillery fire against the remaining insurgents: ‘as soon as rebels fired one shot from a building,’ says Ascher, ‘artillerymen trained their guns on the building and blasted it.’¹³ Troops now fired indiscriminately on any group of people who gathered in the streets. By 14 December many of the insurrectionaries in the city had either been arrested or fled. Finally, on 15 December the military forces that Dubasov had requested arrived: notably, 1500 troops of the elite Semenovskiy Regiment. They entered the city on the single railroad line that remained open—the Nikolaevskiy Line from Petersburg. By that time the government had already

reduced all the rebel-held areas in the city except for the proletarian Presnia district. The Semenovskiy Regiment's commander had no compunction about using artillery against the district's buildings. Dubasov's troops trained sixteen artillery pieces on Presnia, and for two full days they systematically bombarded the district, firing more than 400 shells into the buildings and leaving entire sections in smoldering ruins.

The *semenovtsy* who finally entered Presnia on 16 December were ordered to treat the insurgents mercilessly. Having already been greeted by a hail of bullets from the rebels, the elite force followed their orders, with no regard to law or person. 'Suspicious' groups of people, whether they were combatants or not, were often shot on sight or executed after drumhead courts-martial. The insurrectionary enclave could not withstand this ruthless onslaught, and by 17 December the fighting was over. A delegation of workers approached Colonel Min, the commander of the *semenovtsy*, and accepted his order for a surrender.* On the previous day the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks jointly decided officially to end the strike on 19 December. The cost of the uprising had been terrible by the standards of the day: according to the statistics of the Moscow Medical Union, more than 1000 people, most of them probably civilians, including 86 children, had been killed by government troops during the insurrection and the subsequent bombardment of the Presnia district. The number of wounded in this carnage will never be known, but the figure must have been enormous. Yet despite its high cost in human life and injuries, the Moscow insurrection of 1905 had a very important consequence: it severed the political alliance between the bourgeois liberals and the revolutionary workers. None of the bourgeois parties had supported the insurrection. On the contrary, they condemned it to one degree or another and, fearful of a future working-class insurrection, fled into the arms of the autocracy.

Nor did the crushing of the Moscow insurrection end Witte's repression. To the contrary, Nicholas's minister, who now revealed that he had a particularly cruel streak despite his reputation as a far-seeing statesman, unleashed a 'white terror' over the whole length of Russia. Punitive expeditions were sent out to other restless cities, towns, and peasant villages, and all suspected revolutionaries were arrested, shot by the hundreds, or sent off to Siberia in the many thousands. The repression was especially savage in the Baltic region, where the tsar's military forces, in a veritable carnage, claimed thousands of

* That same morning most of the *druzhiniki*, under the orders of their commander, the Bolshevik militant Z. Litvin, drifted out of the district and dispersed. Had they been caught with arms in hand, they would likely have been shot. As it was, the hundreds of casualties resulting from the invasion of the district apparently consisted of ordinary civilians who had the misfortune to be spotted in the streets by the soldiers.

lives by hanging and firing squad. Detachments of soldiers were sent along the Trans-Siberian railroad line to terrorize towns and villages that had risen against the tsar or misbehaved in ways offensive to the officers in charge. Peasants in remote parts of the empire were subjected to public beatings and their huts wantonly burned to the ground. For the rest of the winter of 1905 to 1906, the tsarist regime waged a one-sided civil war against the Russian people that did not abate until the country had been cowed into submission.

THE SOVIETS OF 1905

The 1905 Revolution created the first soviets as institutions of proletarian self-government. The autocracy had so completely suppressed the kinds of intermediary working-class institutions familiar to Western Europe, such as trade unions and labor parties, that the Russian workers were compelled to create their own institutions *ab novo*. In Petersburg the formation of the 1905 soviet was largely forced upon the workers by a great variety of circumstances. In the absence of any trade unions to take control of the situation, the soviets arose to maintain the most basic amenities of life. Strike committees simply fused together, to feed the capital, to provide its population with means of public transportation, and to police its streets.

The Petersburg and Moscow Soviets thus became governmental centers in their own right. During the three months of its existence the Petersburg Soviet was a relatively democratic and popular body. Its deputies were elected directly by the workers in mass assemblies on shop floors, and soviet delegates were directly answerable to and recallable by the workers who elected them, especially those that existed on the district level. The district soviets approximated a direct democracy more closely than any institution aside from popular assemblies like the French sections of 1793.

Their emergence, it must be emphasized, baffled Bolshevik and Menshevik theorists—soviets were alien to the revolutionary tradition in which Marxists were schooled. Guided by Lenin, the Bolsheviks tended to think of a future 'dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry' not as a confederation of proletarian democracies but as a republic, like the Jacobin republic of the French Convention. Lenin made no secret of his wish for a party-state, controlled by the Bolsheviks. Initially he seems to have accepted the soviets simply as arenas for Bolshevik propaganda, but he also expressed fears that the wide diversity of political perspectives that they could harbor might endanger his own policies. Indeed, Lenin saw *any* body that was not controlled by his emerging

party as a 'petty bourgeois' indulgence, even as an obstacle to a Jacobin-type centralized state. Soviets, in Lenin's view, were to be welcomed solely

for the purpose of developing the Social-Democratic movement; at the same time the Social-Democratic Party organisations must bear in mind that if Social-Democratic activities among the proletarian masses are properly, effectively and widely organised, such institutions [as soviets] may actually become superfluous.¹⁴

It should not be surprising, then, that Lenin's role in the 1905 Revolution was minimal: he had no impact on the events and seemed more an observer than a participant, addressing the Petersburg Soviet only once and then ignoring it after a visit or two.

The soviets of 1905 were equally vexing to the anarchists, since as representative institutions, however informal in character (rather than directly democratic bodies), they resembled statist institutions, the embodiments of authority and power. As for the syndicalists, the soviets had little in common with their program of workers' committees for control of production. The Mensheviks, however, welcomed the soviets, regarding them as institutions of proletarian self-government, even as quasi-legal workers' parliaments. But they were either unclear or divided about the relationship of these institutions to the bourgeois republic they professed to demand. To his credit, only Trotsky, among the major Russian Marxists, saw the importance of the soviets as political class institutions that potentially provided a revolutionary alternative to a bourgeois-democratic state, a position that Lenin did not definitively adopt until 1917.

NOTES

1. Gerald D. Surh, *1905 in St Petersburg: Labor, Society, and Revolution* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 279.

2. J.H.L. Keep, *The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 234.

3. Nicholas II to Maria Feodorovna (Oct. 19, 1905), quoted in Sidney Harcave, *The Russian Revolution of 1905* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1970), p. 190.

4. The October Manifesto is reproduced in full in *ibid.*, pp. 195-6.

5. Quoted in Surh, *1905*, p. 356.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 370.

7. V.M. Zenzinov, quoted in Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 313.

8. Quoted in Laura Engelstein, *Moscow, 1905: Working-Class Organization and Political Conflict* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1982), p. 200.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
10. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 206.
11. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 205-6.
12. Keep, *Rise of Social Democracy in Russia*, p. 253.
13. Engelstein, *Moscow, 1905*, p. 320.
14. V.I. Lenin, 'Draft Resolution for the Fifth Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. on "Non-Party Workers' Organisations and the Anarcho-Syndicalist Trend Among the Proletariat"' (Feb. 1907), in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), p. 12:143.

CHAPTER 42 The Crisis of Socialism

THE THREE DUMAS

On 23 April 1906, in keeping with his promise to provide Russia with a measure of constitutional legality, Nicholas promulgated the so-called Fundamental Laws, which supposedly established the system of rights sketched by the October Manifesto. In fact, the tsar of the realm actually violated even the mildly reformist spirit in which the Manifesto had been issued. The autocrat (a title the tsar still retained) kept all of the executive powers that he traditionally held as head of state, including control over the armed forces, the exclusive right to make war and conduct foreign policy, and the right to exercise complete authority over the dynastic succession. Significantly, his ministers were accountable only to him, not to the Duma, and he was free to veto any of the Duma's enactments, issue *ukazes* between its sessions (which had the power of law), and even dismiss the Duma as he chose.

Still hopeful for a revolutionary resurgence, all of Russia's established socialist parties—Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and SRs—called for a boycott of the Duma elections, which were in the offing in April 1906. But the masses were eager to acquire any relaxation of tsarist absolutism, and the boycott call notwithstanding, they participated in the elections in great numbers. In the absence of substantial Left participation, the urban workers and middle classes threw their support to the liberal Kadets. In fact, to everyone's surprise, the normally conservative peasants gave their greatest support not to the Right but to the left-wing Labor Group, or *Trudoviks*. Like the working class, the peasantry no longer relied on the myth of autocratic paternalism; its vote for the *trudoviky* was a clear indication that these 'small proprietors', as Lenin disdainfully called them, were quite capable of acting in a radical manner.

The First Duma's sessions were marked by persistent demands for a constituent assembly, land reform, and expansive civil liberties. The tsar, shocked

by this turnabout, dissolved the Duma after 70-odd days. Faced with elections to the next Duma, the government did all it could to ensure that the new members would be more tractable than the previous ones, but the Second Duma was, in fact, even more obstreperous than the First, not least because this time the Social Democrats and the SRs participated in the elections and gained representation. When the Second Duma met in February 1907, it encountered a new antagonist: the prime minister, Pyotr Stolypin, an unyielding political reactionary who was intent on prosecuting the 55 Social Democratic Duma deputies for treason. To do so, however, the Duma would have had somehow to lift their parliamentary immunity, which it decidedly refused to do. Thus after three months the Second Duma also was dissolved.

An infuriated Nicholas and his ministers were now determined to formulate an electoral law that would drastically reduce peasant and working-class representation, while greatly increasing that of the landed gentry. The Third Duma, which emerged under the new law, was quite willing to accept Stolypin's restrictive policies—hence it was permitted to live out its legally authorized life span, from 1907 to 1912. Stolypin, in turn, began his own rule by making the years 1906 and 1907 into the most repressive experienced by either liberals or radicals since the bleak reign of Alexander III. He ruthlessly crushed the scattered peasant uprisings and military mutinies that followed in the wake of the 1905 uprising. The government's savage attack occurred in great part as a response to the terror that the SRs and assorted anarchist groups unleashed against all levels of governmental authority. Terrorist organizations and soloists assassinated more than 4000 people, principally police officials, gentry, government bureaucrats, overseers in factories and on estates, nobles, and high-ranking administrators. Stolypin's own summer residence was blown up, killing 32 people and wounding the prime minister's son and daughter as well as others in or near the building.

Verging on panic, Stolypin's new government declared a general state of emergency. The empire was sectioned into 82 areas, and each one was placed under special regulations that gave the authorities sweeping powers to subdue the revolutionaries and rebellious peasants. A law promulgated by the prime minister in August 1906—but never submitted to the Duma—allowed special military courts to be established granting officials without any juridical training the authority summarily to try alleged rebels and even hang them. An official could convene such a court 24 hours after an act of terrorism was committed; nor did its deliberations have to last more than 48 hours. Once the accused was found guilty, the sentence—usually death—was carried out immediately. At least a thousand people were executed by these kangaroo courts; the nooses that hanged the victims were grimly called 'Stolypin's neckties'. Known or

suspected Social Democrats and SRs were simply rounded up *en masse* and imprisoned or exiled to Siberia.

So effective was Stolypin's repression that revolutionaries fled to the West in large numbers, including the entire Central Committee of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries. Groups of soldiers and rightist freebooters, almost certainly subsidized by landlords, roamed the countryside, razing entire villages and hanging or shooting suspected as well as known peasant rebels who were suspected of attacking manors and expropriating land in 1905. Pogroms were waged against defenseless Jews throughout the country until world public opinion, shocked by the massacres, obliged Nicholas to rein in his official and unofficial ruffians.

What remained of the revolutionary movement of 1905 was pulverized. The once-sizable Social Democratic organizations were reduced to small, scattered, and forlorn groups. Their leaders who had not been arrested were obliged to seek refuge in Europe: Lenin resumed his peripatetic exile, mainly in Geneva, Paris, Cracow and finally Zurich. Martov encountered his erstwhile friend in London, Paris and Zimmerwald (in Switzerland), while Trotsky drifted through Berlin and Vienna and, after the outbreak of the world war, crossed the Atlantic to live briefly in New York City.

But Stolypin was too shrewd to resort to brute force alone. To give the monarchy with a social base, he provided peasants with the means to break away from the supposed tyranny of the paternalistic village and consolidate their land allotments into compact farmsteads—in short, economically viable petty-bourgeois enterprises. Peasants, Stolypin hoped, would eagerly embrace individual proprietorship and gratefully support the monarchy. New 'strong and sober' property-owners, the government anticipated, would constitute a base upon which tsardom could rest and re-create the Russian peasantry into a reactionary force comparable to the French peasantry.

The Bolsheviks, especially Lenin, saw Stolypin's policy to break up the village commune as a threat to their hopes for an imminent revolutionary upsurge and a step toward Russia's modernization—which, according to Marxist precept, they should have welcomed. Stolypin's policies, in the event, were only partly successful. Although the government's Land Bank issued loans for private proprietorship and tried to solve the burdensome problems of strip farming, most peasants in the central provinces of European Russia (where the communal system embraced nearly all of the villagers) resisted Stolypin's policy outright or accepted it with considerable reluctance. In all, between 1906 and 1914 only about one in five peasant households—farming only 15 per cent of the land—actually withdrew from the *obshchina* or filed a petition to do so. Many households that chose to privatize did so in order to sell their already small and dwindling allotment, usually with a view to leaving

the village and finding permanent work in a city. To be sure, a number of peasants, the so-called *kulaks* (fists), who already owned considerable tracts, increased their holdings and became successful farmers. But they were thoroughly detested by the mass of peasantry, who found the *obshchina* a major source of stability and support. Stolypin did not live to see the failure of his agrarian reform policy: in September 1911 he was assassinated by SR terrorists.

Before his death, however, the old reactionary had loosened his grip on the country and cautiously allowed a number of political reforms. A year after his assassination the regime he had created used the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty to grant a general amnesty to political offenders in prison or in exile within the country. Martov and Fyodor Dan, among the Mensheviks, and Lev Kamenev, among the Bolsheviks, were permitted to return to Russia. Lenin might have done so too, had he so chosen, but always prudent and aware that the government regarded him as especially dangerous, he remained in foreign exile. Trotsky, as a 'criminal' fugitive from internal exile, was not eligible for the amnesty.

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AFTER 1905

The 1905 Revolution had temporarily harmonized relations between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks—both factions alike had been swept up by the general strikes and the Moscow insurrection. The positive experience with the soviets had lessened the Bolsheviks' mistrust of mass non-party organizations, upon which the Mensheviks placed a high premium; the Mensheviks, in turn, gained greater respect for the Bolsheviks' capacity to prepare and organize an insurrection. The two factions also began to converge in their more positive attitude toward the soviets. After a Fourth (Unification) Congress in Stockholm in 1906 it seemed that the two groups would come together to form a single organization with a common program.

Lenin's recurring mistrust of the Mensheviks, however, now put him at odds with his own Bolshevik followers, but he reluctantly yielded to their collaborative mood. The marriage was ostensibly finalized at the Fifth Congress of the RSDWP, held in London in April and May 1907. At this congress Bolsheviks and Mensheviks agreed on the details of how to work as a single organization, leading Lenin and his dwindling ranks of followers warily to share places with the Mensheviks on the party's central committee and the editorial board of its newspaper, *Sotsial-Demokrat*.

Lenin, however, was not one to deceive himself that he could remain for

long in the same party with a faction that sought to achieve a working accommodation with the 'bourgeois democratic' liberals, and there is reason to suspect that after 1903 he had formed a secret Bolshevik 'center' of highly committed supporters, which essentially functioned as a *sub rosa* revolutionary central committee for his faction even after the Fifth Congress. His faction remained intact, and he often appropriated financial bequests that had been made to the party as a whole for his own press and organization. Nor did he hesitate to resort to robberies ('expropriations', or 'exes', as they were called) to replenish his faction's funds, despite party policy that condemned them as morally and psychologically reprehensible.

The surface harmony between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks continued up to the end of 1910, when it began to disintegrate and finally collapsed. The Bolsheviks were more resolved than ever to build a highly centralized party composed of an elite of professional revolutionaries. Indeed, Lenin relished the accusation that he was a modern 'Jacobin', and especially after 1905, he was convinced, as he had every reason to be, that the liberal bourgeoisie could not be trusted to make a democratic revolution or any significant social change without compromising with the tsarist order. Accordingly, the proletariat and the landless peasantry would be obliged jointly to establish their own revolutionary 'dictatorship of the proletariat *and* poor peasantry'. The Bolsheviks, in effect, were prepared to form a revolutionary coalition government with revolutionary workers' and peasants' parties alone—not with the liberals—with the goal of completing the 'bourgeois democratic' revolution on terms most advantageous to the working classes. Exactly what form such a revolutionary democracy would take was by no means clear in Lenin's mind. In some of his writings he seems to have been inspired by a Jacobin-type republic as in 1793 or a 'Commune-state', as he confusedly called it, such as the Parisians had tried to establish in 1871.

The Mensheviks, in turn, had been shaken, during the Moscow insurrection, to find their behavior converging with that of the Bolsheviks; they had not expected to find themselves frightening the so-called 'democratic' bourgeoisie. As Bertram D. Wolfe so astutely observed, they experienced a 'crisis of inner remorse' and emphatically resolved never to repeat this mistake:

So deeply did [the Mensheviks] repent now of their ideological sins, committed when the revolutionary tide had swept them off their feet, that henceforth [they] were to become passionate pedants in their insistence that the working class must thrust the power into the hands of the bourgeoisie, though the latter was losing its appetite for rule without the security of a Tsar.¹

There are strong reasons to believe that the Mensheviks, in fact, regarded the failure of the 1905 Revolution as the price that Russia had paid for even demanding the eight-hour day. Renewed in their commitment to the formation of a European-type mass working-class party whose rules for membership were relatively lax, they reaffirmed their belief that after a revolution the Russian working class would have to defer to the bourgeoisie and allow it to develop a Western-style industrial economy and a parliamentary democracy in Russia. Only at some distant time in the future, they contended, would it be meaningful for the proletariat to establish a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' (an expression that was plainly distasteful to their liberal sensibilities), albeit one that was highly democratic and that would embrace the vast majority of the working population.

Despite a barrage of criticism, Lenin meant to keep Russian Social Democracy a revolutionary movement and preserve the party's integrity and self-definition as a consistently anti-capitalist force. The Mensheviks, by contrast, were enamored by notions of a mass Western-type organization, a two-stage revolution that first gave power to the liberals, and then sought to throw open the doors of the RSDWP to anyone who agreed with its minimum program. Lenin, by contrast, regarded such an approach as an odious subversion of the party's revolutionary and socialist identity. His refusal to make compromises on these issues exposed him to charges of 'sectarianism', 'dogmatism', and a 'dictatorial' pursuit of 'personal aggrandizement'.

Finally in the summer of 1912 an impatient Lenin assembled his available supporters for a conference in Prague and, with the hesitant aid of Sergo Ordzhonikidze, a hard-fisted Georgian activist, moved toward the formation of a separate Russian socialist party. Lenin persuaded the conference, which had no more than twenty participants (of whom two were stray Mensheviks!) to regard itself as a full party 'congress', and it voted to designate itself as the sole Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, essentially expelling all opponents of Lenin's basic views. No one else in Russian Social Democracy but Lenin would have taken such a daring step. All Mensheviks and Bolsheviks who were eager to achieve party unity (whom Lenin designated as 'liquidators') were simply placed outside the pale of the organization. The 'congress' elected a new central committee for the new party. Its central committee was divided into two bureaus—a Foreign Bureau, consisting of Lenin and his new young associate Gregory Zinoviev, and a Russian Bureau, which included a large, ever-changing group that, for a time, exercised nominal control over the party's affairs.

After considerable infighting over whether to participate in Duma elections, Lenin, who had doubted the boycott policy of 1906, succeeded in convincing his faction to participate in all Duma contests. With a handful of Bolshevik

deputies in the Duma and a legal, albeit heavily censored newspaper, *Pravda* (Truth), the Bolsheviks began to grow with extraordinary rapidity until they became a major working-class party. Their membership numbered in the thousands, with many supporters in Russia's industrial cities, particularly St Petersburg and Moscow. In 1912 *Pravda* was read by more than 60,000 workers, exceeding the circulation of the Menshevik organ *Luch* (Light Ray) by some 10,000 readers. The Bolsheviks managed to acquire leading roles in most of the legal trade unions and the workers' committees that administered the newly formed and important state insurance system. Notwithstanding many myths about the diminutive size of the Bolshevik Party, on the eve of the world war, it was probably the largest workers' party in Russia.

By no means, however, did Lenin control the new party. Most of the central committee members, although nominally Bolsheviks, were weary of Lenin's fractious behavior and frequently challenged his divisiveness. He was frequently reproved for his excessive attacks on the Mensheviks and blocked from publishing many of his articles in the party's new organ, which first appeared legally in Russia in April 1912. The six Bolshevik Duma deputies acted very much on their own, at times in concert with the seven Menshevik deputies, much to Lenin's chagrin.

Not only were the Bolsheviks growing steadily, but the Russian proletariat itself was growing numerically and becoming increasingly rebellious. In the first six months of 1914, political strikes brought more workers into the streets than had participated in all the strikes in 1905. Two weeks before war erupted, a general strike, led primarily by Bolshevik worker-militants, gave rise to violent clashes with police that went on for well over a week. According to Leopold Haimson's vivid account:

Many thousands of workers . . . clashed with the police—at times fighting them with clubs or hailing them with rocks from behind improvised barricades. Women and children had joined in building these barricades—out of telephone and telegraph poles, overturned wagons, boxes, and armoires. No sooner was a demonstration dispersed, or a barricade destroyed, than the workers, after evacuating their wounded, would regroup, and clashes would start all over again. Whole districts were without light, their gas and kerosene lamps having been destroyed.²

On 1 August 1914, four days after this strike was quelled, Russia went to war with Germany. Almost immediately, a huge wave of nationalistic chauvinism abruptly ended the economic, social, and political crisis that had been spreading over many parts of the empire.

WAR AND THE COLLAPSE OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

As we have seen, the Second International had discussed the prospect of a general European war at several of its conferences before 1914.³ But how to respond? Proposals to stage a general strike of the European proletariat had been raised as early as the International's Congress at Zurich in 1893, and again at Paris in 1900, and still again at Amsterdam in 1904. Despite thundering rhetoric against the prospect of a world conflict, however, none of these congresses committed its member parties to an unequivocal agreement to strike against the looming conflict.

At the International's Stuttgart Congress of 1907, Jean Jaurès, Edouard Vaillant and Gustave Hervé presented resolutions that called for general strikes and insurrections against an outbreak of war, but the 'Resolution on War and Militarism' that the Congress actually passed proposed nothing concrete. Its most important paragraph, in fact, was merely a tactical caveat: 'The International is not able to determine in rigid forms the anti-militarist actions of the working class. These naturally vary for different countries for different circumstances of time and place.'⁴ Thus the Congress essentially stipulated what the International could not do rather than what it could do to try to prevent a war.

By the summer of 1914, however, a decision on concrete common action could no longer be deferred. On 28 June Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated during a visit to Sarajevo by a Serbian nationalist. A month later, on 28 July, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia and a day later bombarded her capital. With dizzying rapidity the situation careened toward a general European conflict. On 30 July, Russia ordered a general mobilization of her vast reserves of peasant-soldiers. In Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm sent an ultimatum to the tsar demanding the demobilization of Russian troops within twelve hours. But the tsar rapidly continued mobilizing his armies, and on 1 August Germany declared war on Russia, followed on 3 August by a declaration of war on France. On the same day the Kaiser sent an ultimatum to the Belgians, demanding the right of German troops to enter the country as they swept across the lowlands to France. The Belgian king refused: the country's neutrality had been guaranteed by Britain, as well as other European powers, and Germany's violation of that neutrality brought Britain into the war on the side of Belgium and France.

Bent on challenging Britain's naval supremacy with his own maritime force and eager to extend his colonial rule in Africa by taking territory that the French had colonized in the previous century, Wilhelm acted with a determination that shocked much of the neutral world. German troops were permitted to commit outrageous atrocities in their advance through the lowlands,

which polarized socialists along national lines. Nationalism replaced class politics, all but effacing the avowed internationalism of Marxists, anarchists and pacifists. France's republican system—and its posturing as the home of the Great Revolution—earned the Allies greater moral support from the world's liberals and socialists than the Reich's authoritarian legacy, but as events unfolded, the French Republic was no less eager than the Kaiser's Germany to resume the Franco-Prussian War and finish it off in its own favor and absorb the German-speaking Rhineland. Russia's participation in the Allied coalition, in turn, allowed German militarists to claim that it was fighting to protect Europe from 'Asiatic barbarism'—a claim that pro-war German Social Democrats invoked (drawing amply from Marx's anti-Russian writings) to rationalize their support for the Kaiser. Britain's participation in the war was patently motivated by an attempt to prevent Germany from gaining supremacy on the seas and to retain the old European 'balance of power', the keystone of British diplomatic policy on the Continent. The English, French and Russians were all eager to carve up the moribund Turkish Empire. The other belligerents, including Serbia, who had their own territorial ambitions, could barely pretend to be fighting for lofty ideological goals. The key to gaining popular support by all the governments in the war was a crude chauvinism that the First International had been created to oppose and that its successor dishonored.

In August 1914 few Europeans, mindful of the brief Franco-Prussian War, expected the war to last long. Conventional military wisdom—among general staffs and recruits alike—predicted that the conflict would be over by autumn or winter of 1914 at the very latest. The declarations of war initiated by Vienna and Berlin seemed to provide a release for tensions of all kinds—psychological, social and cultural—that had been building up for years. The popular anxiety that was initially manifested in anti-war demonstrations almost immediately gave way to a wave of popular chauvinism and patriotism. Trotsky, walking through the streets of Vienna in August, wondered, 'What was it that drew to the square of the War Ministry the Viennese bootmaker's apprentice, Pospischil, half German, half Czech; or our greengrocer, Frau Maresch; or the cabman Frankl? What sort of an idea? The national idea? But Austria-Hungary was the very negation of any national idea.'⁵ The scandalously chauvinistic slogan '*Alle Serben müssen sterben*' (All Serbs must die) was plastered throughout Vienna; comparable slogans appeared on walls in the other belligerent countries, including Russia. The name St Petersburg was changed to the less German-sounding Petrograd, and patriotism became so pervasive that many workers who only a few weeks earlier had supported anti-war Social Democratic slogans now reverentially sang 'God Save the Tsar' and excoriated or even beat up the dwindling number of their fellow proletarians who still

professed to be internationalists. Bolshevik militants who had been leading them in virtual insurrectionary strikes were excoriated and even beaten up. To the astonishment of their deputies to the Duma, the nationalist upsurge overwhelmed nearly all the parties, socialist as well as bourgeois, as did their counterparts in Europe's various parliaments.

The war, once it began, continued not for four months but for four years and claimed the lives of approximately 10 million combatants—mainly men under 40 years of age—in a monstrous network of trenches that sprawled for hundreds of miles across the battlefields of France, northern Italy and Russia. Russia's incompetent generals sent more than 2 million peasants in uniform, poorly equipped and poorly trained, to their graves. Germany's losses quickly approached 2 million as well, followed by nearly 1.5 million Frenchmen, 1.25 million Austro-Hungarians and a million Britons, not to speak of Italian, Turkish and other losses. Men were massacred by the tens of thousands in only a few days of futile offensives, and the wounded—often limbless, blind, or otherwise mutilated—filled nearly every hospital in Europe.

The outbreak of the world war, and the reactions to it, demolished the Second International as an effective socialist organization. Not only did the International fail to stand up resolutely against the very imperialism that its congresses had denounced for decades; but its most important parties—particularly the German SPD, 'Marx's own party', as it was long denoted—discarded its most important anti-imperialist principles. French and Belgian socialists' attempts to create a common front with their German comrades against the Kaiser's patently aggressive policies failed ignominiously. Long-standing friendships among comrades who for decades had affirmed their internationalist solidarity arm in arm at congresses of the International ruptured ignominiously.

No less shameful was the way the German Social Democrats came to the support of Wilhelm and the Fatherland. On 25 July, the party's leadership published an open letter in *Vorwärts* (Forward), its official organ, condemning not Berlin but Vienna for provoking the war—and carefully ignoring the German government's ultimatum to Russia against mobilization. The party's executive committee declared indignantly:

No drop of German soldier's blood must be sacrificed to the Austrian despots' lust for power, to imperialist commercial interests. Comrades, we call upon you to express immediately in mass-meetings the unshakable will for peace of the class-conscious proletariat. . . . The ruling classes, who in peace-time oppress you, despise you, exploit you, want to use you as cannon fodder. Everywhere the cry must ring in despots' ears: 'We want no war! Down with war! Long live international brotherhood!'⁶

Even as the SPD called for mass meetings against the war and inveighed with brave words against the Austrians for fomenting it (leaving Wilhelm's assistance unmentioned), the underlying reformism of Social Democracy began to surface in the behavior of its leaders. When Léon Jouhaux of the French General Confederation of Labor appealed to Carl Legien of the social democratic German Free Unions to join him in calling for a joint general strike, the CGT leader received no answer whatever.⁷ On 29 July, the top leaders of the European parties, from Victor Adler of the Austrian party to Angelica Balabanov of the Italian, traveled to Brussels to attend an emergency meeting of the International's bureau. But they quickly found that they could not agree on a practical policy against the impending war and deferred any decision to the congress that the International had scheduled for 9 August.

As early as 26 July, however, German Social Democratic leaders—specifically Hugo Haase, who had succeeded Bebel after his death as the party's chief, and Otto Braun, the party's treasurer—met with the German chancellor, Theodor Bethmann-Hollweg. The chancellor made it very clear to Haase and Braun that Germany would stand by Austria-Hungary—clearly indicating that the Reich would ally itself with the dual monarchy. The hostilities, he emphasized, would be preceded by a period of martial law—meaning that the imperial government would outlaw the SPD if it opposed the war. A right-wing Social Democratic deputy to the Reichstag, Albert Südekum, wrote a secret report on 29 July assuring Bethmann-Hollweg that 'no actions of any kind (general or partial strike, sabotage, and the like) [by the SPD] are planned or even to be feared precisely because of our desire for peace.'⁸ The German chancellor could thus knowledgeably assure the Prussian Ministry of State that it had nothing to fear from the leadership of the German socialist movement.

The *Vorwärts* continued to agitate for peace, but by 30 July its editorial board was divided over which line to take. On 31 July the SPD's executive committee convened to wrestle with the agonizing question of whether the party's Reichstag deputies should vote in favor of war credits if the Kaiser declared war. Hugo Haase, who led the SPD's parliamentary caucus, vigorously opposed a vote to finance the war, while Philipp Scheidemann, a leader of the party's right wing, voiced his support for the Fatherland, with the result that the executive initially failed to come to a decision on whether to vote for credits.

Meanwhile the SPD made a final attempt to work out a joint plan of action with the French Socialists. But as soon as their delegate, Hermann Müller, a member of the SPD executive, arrived in Paris, he realized that French Socialists would vote in favor of war credits. Upon returning to Berlin on 3 August, he reported to his party that a joint strategy with the French Socialists would be unattainable. Meanwhile, Germany had actually declared war, and it

was announced that the vote on the war credits to support the Imperial Army would occur in the Reichstag the next day.

On 3 August, after agonizing days of concentrated discussion and argument, the SPD's parliamentary caucus decided (78 to 14, with a few abstentions) to vote for the credits. The 'Russian peril'—Bethmann-Hollweg's line that Russian despotism was the real culprit in the war—became the specious excuse for abetting Prussian militarism in plunging Europe into a four-year continent-wide war, despite the fact that only days before the war crisis emerged, Russian workers had been on the verge of an insurrection.

Party solidarity required that the SPD Reichstag members deliver the vote unanimously, irrespective of dissenting views within the party faction. Thus on 4 August Haase, despite his opposition to the vote, was obliged as head of the party to declare that the SPD supported the appropriation of funds for the conflict. To complete the irony of the occasion, an SPD back-bencher wrote in a letter to a friend:

I saw [German] reservists join the colours and go forth singing Social Democrat songs! Some Socialist reservists I knew said to me: 'We are going to the front with an easy mind, because we know that the Party will look after us if we are wounded, and that the Party will take care of our families if we don't come home.'⁹

The long years of socialist opposition to German expansionism, which had once sent some SPD leaders to prison for refusing to support the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, were now a distant memory. This vast, indeed cumbersome party—raised to public prominence with the support of a huge bureaucracy; financed by its periodicals, cooperatives, varied enterprises, and investments; stupefied by its own parliamentary self-importance; and guided by a highly conservative trade union leadership—had drained German socialism of whatever revolutionary spirit it had had in the leaner years of its existence. Whether the SPD could have succeeded in arresting the war, given the wave of patriotism that swept over the German people, is questionable, but any losses in public support that it might have suffered in 1914 would have been more than recouped in the years that followed. When the French Socialist leader Hervé denounced the SPD at the International's 1907 Stuttgart Congress as 'an electoral and accounting machine, a party of cash registers and parliamentary seats,' indeed shouting that 'the whole Social Democracy has now become bourgeois,' he may have been saying even more than many of the party's left-wingers were prepared to acknowledge.¹⁰

The French Socialists did not behave very differently. Their most vocal opponent of the war, Jaurès, was assassinated on 31 July by a deranged patriot,

leaving the party's anti-war tendency in the hands of the much less militant Jean Longuet, Marx's grandson. Even if Jaurès had lived, however, it is highly improbable that his views could have prevailed in the party; nor is it certain that he would have continued to hold them when the war took the form of a German invasion. Jules Guesde, who had been the most orthodox of Marxists within the International, became a vigorous patriot and even entered the government. The syndicalist CGT shifted from its traditional anti-statist general strike position to support for the republic. Such esteemed French anarchists as Jean Grave, Charles Malato and Paul Reclus rallied to the support of the Allied cause.

The Belgian socialists, whose country had been brutally trampled upon by German armies, could most easily claim that they had been forced by circumstances to participate in a war they never wanted. But no internationalist sentiments or feelings of class solidarity subsequently diminished their now-passionate hatred of all things German, including German Social Democracy. Indeed, all the Social Democratic parties in the belligerent countries were dramatically transformed from opponents of the war into ardent supporters of their country's respective 'cause'—and *de facto* opponents of their former comrades on the other side of the battlefield. Curiously, the Serbian Socialist deputies dutifully opposed war credits but reversed themselves once the conflict finally got under way. The SPD, like most Social Democratic parties in the belligerent countries, declared a suspension of the class struggle—a 'civil peace' policy of public unity—in support of their respective governments.

Russia proved to be an exception. Here the Bolshevik and Menshevik deputies in the Duma issued a joint statement denouncing the war as imperialist and walked out without voting for financial support for the war. But the 'father of Russian Marxism', Plekhanov, as well as the old *Iskra* hand Potresov, defected to 'social patriotism' (as anti-war socialists named the civil peace policy), joined by a number of Mensheviks and SRs, who supported the Allied cause and, by extension, the very tsarist despotism against which they had struggled throughout their adult lives. Rising Menshevik stars such as Nikolai Chkheidze and Mikhail Skobelev took another tack and declared that, if tsarism were overthrown, they would support the Allies against Prussian militarism. From his London exile Peter Kropotkin, the aging theorist of anarcho-communism, embraced the Allied cause so fervently that he violently broke with some of his closest British comrades.

The Second International was all but dead. Within the secretariat of the International Socialist Bureau, the remnant of the International, most representatives of the various parties in the belligerent countries adopted the same chauvinistic attitudes as their bourgeois compatriots toward the 'enemy' and refused even to meet in the same room with each other. The outbreak of the

war and the SPD's collaboration with the Reich all but shattered Lenin. When he read in *Vorwärts* that the party had voted for war credits, he was so shaken that he initially insisted that the report had been forged by the German general staff in an attempt to disorient the world socialist movement. When he realized the truth, he flatly declared that he no longer considered himself Social Democrat—he was now a Communist.

THE INTERNATIONALIST OPPOSITION

The war lasted far longer than the belligerents had expected. Following the German offensives in the West and the rollback of Russian troops from Prussia in the East, the conflict ground down into seemingly endless trench warfare, claiming life on an appalling scale and producing extreme economic misery at home—especially for the Central Powers, who were effectively blockaded by Allied navies.

Each passing year after 1914 saw the growth of anti-war sentiment among socialists, anarchists, and even leftist liberals, with the result that the policy of civil peace began steadily to unravel. More than most of their European counterparts, Russian socialists and anarchists remained almost solidly opposed to tsarism and refused to collaborate with the hated monarchy. The British Independent Labor Party had never supported the war: led by Keir Hardie, many Independents were pacifists as well as anti-imperialists. In Germany Karl Liebknecht, a Social Democratic deputy to the Reichstag and the son of the late Wilhelm Liebknecht, broke the SPD's parliamentary unity in December 1914 and voted against any further credits to the military, launching a vigorous public campaign against the war. 'Every people's main enemy,' he declared in May 1915, 'is in their own country!'¹¹ He was joined by Rosa Luxemburg and a growing coterie of fervent Internationalists, as socialist opponents of the war were called. Despite persecution and arrests by the imperial government, the German Internationalists and others from socialist and non-socialist ranks were now determined to follow a policy of active opposition to the war and to the policy of civil peace.

As a Russian, Lenin would have faced internment on German and Austrian territory and so fled to the safety of neutral Zurich and Bern. In early September 1914, the Bolshevik leader advanced a consistent internationalist position in 'The Tasks of Revolutionary Social Democracy in the European War', bluntly denouncing the war as imperialist, dynastic, and 'a striving to suppress the revolutionary movement of the proletariat and democracy in the individual countries.' He bitterly inveighed against the SPD leaders for their

'sheer betrayal of socialism', including the Belgian and French socialist leaders as well. His attack swept in the tendencies in Social Democracy that had led to the collapse of the International and singled out the various excuses that the parties had made for collaborating with their respective governments. Lenin then propounded a position that in time acquired the name 'revolutionary defeatism': 'From the view of the working class and the toiling masses of all the peoples of Russia, the defeat of the Tsarist monarchy and its army . . . would be the lesser evil by far.'

Lenin concluded his article by advancing his own 'slogans of Social Democracy': Bolsheviks must issue 'all-embracing propaganda' in the army as well as among the people; organize illegal nuclei in the army against chauvinism and patriotism; press for a 'republican United States of Europe'; and wage an unrelenting revolutionary struggle against tsarism 'coupled with the immediate slogans of a democratic republic, the confiscation of the landed estates, and an eight-hour working day.'

The document was signed by 'a group of Social Democrats, members of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party.'¹² Later articles by Lenin called for the creation of a Third International, and the anti-war socialists, for reasons of their own, soon took the necessary steps to convene leading Internationalists across all the front lines—obviously motivated by the need for a new International. Between 5 and 8 September 1915, in deep secrecy, a general conference of anti-war socialists convened near Bern in the village of Zimmerwald. Organized by the Italian and Swiss socialist parties, the conference brought together 38 delegates from the Left in the SPD as well as a miscellany of Dutch, Bulgarian, Latvian, Polish, Romanian and Russian delegates, as well as the Swiss and Italian socialists who convened it. The French and British delegates were prevented by their respective governments from attending.

The conference participants immediately divided into the usual three wings—a left, a right and a center—each of which drafted its own anti-war manifesto. The 'Left Zimmerwaldians' were led by Lenin, his close aide Gregory Zinoviev, and Karl Radek of the Polish party; they were supported by Ture Nerman and Karl Zeth Höglund of Sweden and by J.A. Berzin of Latvia. The Left's manifesto sharply attacked the 'social patriots' for betraying their most basic principles and particularly condemned the SPD's Reichstag deputies who had voted for war credits and civil peace. It summoned the masses to 'go out into the streets and fling in the face of the ruling class your rallying cry: *Enough of the slaughter!*' Additionally, the manifesto held that the existing pro-war socialist parties were irremediably compromised by their behavior and urged that anti-war socialists must create an entirely new organization in their stead. The document closed by calling for the formation of 'a powerful International [that] . . . will put an end to war and capitalism.'¹³ It was signed by an

imposing list of 'delegations' from Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Sweden, Norway, Germany and Switzerland, most of whose signatories were either Bolsheviks or their supporters.

The 'Zimmerwald Right', composed mainly of anti-war German moderates, opposed an organizational split within the existing social-democratic parties, and was oriented toward a pacifist position rather than a revolutionary one. It was headed by Georg Ledebour and the French syndicalists Alphonse Merheim and Albert Bourderon. The Russian Mensheviks, including Martov, who had been schooling themselves in the art of moderation since 1905, gave their support to the Zimmerwald Right's manifesto. A small Center, which included the Swiss host of the conference, Robert Grimm, as well as Trotsky, Angelica Balabanov of the Italian Socialist Party, and Henriette Roland-Holst from the Netherlands, also emerged that included the bulk of the pacifists who attended and a number of militant revolutionaries who were alienated by the Left's tendency to draw uncompromising differences with the Zimmerwald Right.

A composite final document or 'Zimmerwald Manifesto' (commonly attributed to Trotsky and Roland-Holst) blamed the horrors of the war squarely on capitalism and denounced the socialist parties' support for war credits and civil peace. It called for international proletarian solidarity, a peace free of annexations and war indemnities, and a continued struggle for the 'sacred aims of socialism' and the 'irreconcilable proletarian class struggle.'¹⁴

Representing as it did a compromise by the three factions that made up the conference, the document was unavoidably mild. The Left, in fact, felt obliged to issue a statement of its own declaring that it was 'not fully satisfied with the conference manifesto' because 'it contains no characterization of [the] opportunism' that had caused the Second International's downfall. Moreover, 'it contains no clear characterization of the methods of struggle against the war.'¹⁵ Nevertheless, the Left signed the manifesto in order to preserve a common front of the Zimmerwaldians against the 'social patriots'. The manifesto was translated into a great variety of languages and made its way surreptitiously through the entire European labor movement, exacerbating the mounting popular hatred of the war.

Critics of the war had been raising their voices well before the Zimmerwald conference and were met by ever-intensifying repression. On 7 February 1915, as hunger riots broke out in Berlin, the Reich tried to silence its most militant and well-known anti-war socialist critic by drafting Karl Liebknecht into the army. Less than two weeks later, it arrested the Marxist theorist Rosa Luxemburg for her anti-war agitation. Whenever the Reichstag held further votes on war credits, however, the SPD continued to vote in favor of them, albeit by ever-diminishing margins. Opposition to the war grew within the SPD's Reichstag faction itself, and on 29 December 1915, twenty SPD deputies

finally broke party parliamentary discipline and voted against war credits, while 22 abstained. Thus approximately half of the entire SPD faction now refused to support the government's requests for funds to continue the conflict. In March 1916 Liebknecht (on leave from his regiment) once again voted against war credits and was joined by still other SPD deputies.

All the independent anti-war deputies were summarily expelled from the SPD Reichstag faction, presenting the party with a major split. The committee that had been formed at Zimmerwald to carry on the conference's work called a second conference, this one at Kienthal, another small town outside Bern, in late April 1916. It was attended by 43 delegates and two observers, twelve of whom belonged to the Zimmerwald Left. With the support of seven additional delegates, who voted with the Left on key issues, about half of the conference could be said to adopt a radical stand on the war and the International. The Kienthal Manifesto, however, was surprisingly pacifistic ('Violence begets violence,' read one rather trite conclusion). But the Left scored its gains in other resolutions—particularly those dealing with the conference's relationship with the executive of the Second International—the International Socialist Bureau. The so-called Lapinsky Resolution, named after its Polish sponsor, excoriated the International's executive committee.

By May 1916 more hunger riots broke out in Germany, followed by major strikes in Berlin, Braunschweig, and even at the Krupp armament works in Essen. Early September 1916 and the winter of 1916 saw one strike wave after another sweep over the main Russian cities, particularly Petrograd, where more than 150,000 workers downed tools on 3–9 September, followed by 100,000 on 9 January in commemoration of the anniversary of 'Bloody Sunday'.

Particularly strong feelings of despair began to well up among foreign revolutionaries who were isolated in Switzerland, who had little if any contact with their supporters in the belligerent countries. Lenin, boxed into Zurich, had little contact with his comrades in Russia. On 22 January 1917, in a speech to young Swiss workers at Zurich's Volkhaus (People's House), he grimly lamented, 'We of the older generation may not live to see the decisive battles of this coming revolution.'¹⁶ Only a few weeks later, however, in a sudden turn of events, Petrograd would explode in a revolution that unseated the 300-year-old Romanov dynasty in less than a week and open a period in which the red flag would fly over government buildings not only in the Russian capital but in Berlin, Vienna, Munich and Budapest, to cite only the major cities. Even as despair settled over central and Eastern Europe after three years of carnage, a revolutionary storm suddenly emerged that was to reshape world history.

NOTES

1. Bertram D. Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution: A Biographical History* (New York: Dial Press, 1961), p. 340.
2. Leopold Haimson, 'The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905–1917', *Slavic Review*, vol. 23, no. 4 (1964), p. 642.
3. See *The Third Revolution*, p. 2:306–11.
4. The resolution is reprinted in John Riddell, ed., *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International—Documents: 1907–1916, The Preparatory Years. The Communist International in Lenin's Time* (New York: Monad Press, 1984), pp. 33–7.
5. Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), p. 233.
6. *Vorwärts*, Jul. 25, 1914, quoted in James Joll, *The Second International, 1889–1914* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1966), p. 160.
7. See *The Third Revolution*, p. 2:310.
8. 'Südekum's Report to the Chancellor' (Jul. 29, 1914), rpt. in Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, pp. 119–20.
9. Max König [SPD deputy], in *Vossische Zeitung*, May 5, 1916; rpt. in Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, p. 122.
10. Gustave Hervé, quoted in *Internationaler Sozialistenkongress zu Stuttgart, 18. bis 24. August 1907* (Berlin: Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1907), excerpts rpt. in Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, pp. 27, 28.
11. Karl Liebknecht, 'The Main Enemy Is at Home', rpt. in Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, p. 176.
12. V.I. Lenin, 'The Tasks of the Revolutionary Social Democracy in the European War', in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963), p. 21:15–19. [I have Americanized the spelling and punctuation.]
13. Draft manifesto submitted by the Zimmerwald Left, in Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, pp. 300, 301.
14. 'The Zimmerwald Manifesto', in Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, pp. 318–21.
15. Zimmerwald Left Statement, in Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, p. 315.
16. V.I. Lenin, 'Lecture on the 1905 Revolution', in *Collected Works*, p. 23:253.

PART IX



**THE RUSSIAN
REVOLUTIONS OF
1917**



CHAPTER 43 The Revolution of February 1917

RUSSIA AND PETROGRAD AT WAR

By any standard of reason or morality, Russia's entry into the First World War in July 1914 on the side of the Allied powers was an unprecedented folly. With the possible exceptions of Austria-Hungary and Turkey, no country was less equipped economically and socially to sustain a modern conflict. Austria-Hungary was at least geographically contiguous to the German Reich and could count on its immediate assistance, while Turkey, on the periphery of the world conflict, was generally spared the concerted attention of its opponents.

The Central Powers and the Allies alike had long regarded the seemingly endless manpower reserves of the tsar as Russia's most important asset. This belief may have had some justification during the Napoleonic wars, when massed infantry, hand-to-hand combat, bayonet charges, and cavalry were decisive in winning battles. But from the mid-nineteenth century onward, technology was increasingly replacing the valor of brightly colored infantry and gallant horsemen in national military reserves. By 1914 a great variety of artillery pieces, breech-loading rifles, and especially machine guns rendered mass charges and shoulder-to-shoulder marches of infantry across a battlefield not only obsolete but disastrously wasteful of human life. The Germans had developed their strategies with the aid of the lessons provided by Von Clausewitz and the strategic genius of Von Schlieffen, but most of the Russian command was still frozen mentally in the strategy of the aging Prince Mikhail Kutuzov, whose successful war against Napoleon in 1812 had depended on his huge serf army, the harsh climatic conditions, and the vast spaces of his backward empire.

Russia's pre-modern condition was a recipe for disaster in the Great War, all

the more because her army had no substantial economic base on which to conduct a modern conflict. The country had no land route to the Allied powers along which it could receive material support, and German naval predominance in the Baltic Sea closed off any possibility of transporting adequate foreign aid by a water route. As a result, the Russian army was to suffer immensely high casualties—not only because of superior German weaponry, but also because of huge shortages of supplies.

Moreover, Russian infantry was woefully underequipped. By the time the army was mobilized to its initial wartime strength of 6.5 million in the last days of 1914, its infantry had only about 4.5 million rifles at its disposal. That is to say, anywhere from a quarter to a third of the tsar's infantry lacked the most basic weapons. The army required about 150,000 rifles monthly, but Russian industry could produce only 27,000. In practice, Russian troops in huge numbers had to wait for a suitable number of their comrades to fall before they could enter the conflict against German troops armed with modern guns of all kinds. The Eastern Front required massive artillery bombardments, but Russian industry could supply only a fraction of the shells needed to sustain its guns, at times only two or three for each cannon. Only their rudimentary trenches kept Russian combat troops from being entirely exposed to firepower from sophisticated automatic German weapons. In contrast to other Allied soldiers, the ordinary Russian infantryman went through the war without a steel helmet and commonly without a gas mask. Russian railroad networks were among the most pitiful in Europe and incapable of supplying a huge army; the entire empire had little than a sixth of Austria-Hungary's track mileage.

The initial successes of the Russian army against Germany were highly deceptive. In the opening days of the war Russian armies had sliced suddenly into a militarily unprepared East Prussia, but they were soon driven back at enormous losses and were never again able to mount a serious offensive against the Kaiser's troops that yielded lasting results. By 1916 the Eastern Front was more or less stabilized along a line running from the Gulf of Riga—slightly less than halfway between Petrograd and Warsaw—to the Romanian border. Russia had lost Poland, most of her Baltic provinces, and Galicia at a cost of 2 million dead and wounded as well as 350,000 prisoners. On the eve of the 1917 Revolution, an estimated 1 million Russian soldiers had deserted from the army and returned to their villages. To make up the shortfall, the government conscripted about 15 million men into the army, many of whom were older or younger than the age groups normally eligible for conscription. These peasant-soldiers filled Russian cities in huge numbers, occupying overcrowded and unsanitary barracks, and were commonly at the mercy of newly commissioned junior officers, who treated the older men under their

command with a baronial arrogance that was more redolent of feudal behavior prior to the Emancipation than the conventional military discipline that existed in modern European armies.

Each levy of conscripts for the army, together with the steady drift of peasants into war industries, produced a serious labor shortage in the countryside. As the fateful year of 1917 drew near, severe shortages of staples became the rule in Russian cities, and living costs began to soar beyond the means of the average working-class family. As the availability of consumer goods diminished, the peasants who remained behind to till the land could buy little or nothing in return for their harvests and therefore withheld their crops from the urban centers, which further exacerbated the grave shortages in the cities. Urban women were obliged to line up for hours in front of food shops, often arriving before dawn. Public bitterness, which no amount of patriotic appeals could assuage, intensified steadily, not only against the war but against the autocracy itself, which had grossly mismanaged the distribution of goods for an ill-clad and hungry population as well as military operations.

This anger manifested itself in the increasing restiveness of the working class, whose hatred of the regime burned on a very short fuse after its early outburst of jingoism in 1914 wore off. The war had brought no improvement in the income and working conditions of the proletariat, more than two-thirds of whom were recently arrived peasants from the villages and were housed under terrible and worsening living conditions that already beggared description before the war. Petrograd, however, enjoyed a favored status among Russia's large cities, not only as the capital of the empire but as its most important manufacturing center. Fully 22 per cent of the country's industrial output was produced by its factories, which, during the war, provided work for more than 400,000 men and women in the city proper and its environs. Above all, the capital was Russia's most important center of heavy industry: by 1917 more than 237,000 workers were engaged in metal and hardware production. The city's industrial structure was also its most highly concentrated and technologically advanced: 13 per cent of Petrograd's factories employed nearly 81 per cent (317,000 men and women) of the capital's workforce, or an average of 2400 workers in each enterprise. Impressive as such statistics may be, however, they do not convey the enormous size of the largest plants. The Putilov works, which manufactured vital metal products, employed more than 24,000 workers, making it the largest factory complex in the city. The most socially restless industrial area in the capital was located north of the Neva River, in the Vyborg District, where 18 per cent of the city's proletariat—generally, the youngest, most mobile, and most volatile workers—was concentrated. The two plants with the most militant workers were the Parviainen

and New Lessner plants, with only about 7000 and 6000 workers respectively. Located in the Vyborg District, these two plants were major producers of military goods and had a high concentration of radical workers led by Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries.

Despite the large number of peasants that flooded its factories, the capital's working class was probably the most literate in Russia. Nearly 90 per cent of the men and 65 per cent of the women could read and write. These percentages were even higher among the metalworkers, who were the proletarian backbone of the capital's Bolsheviks in the troubled months preceding the outbreak of war. As has been noted, they formed the most politically advanced and volatile sector of the Petrograd proletariat.

The newly arrived peasants, especially single and mobile young men, may not have been schooled in socialist ideas, but they were disposed to direct action or *buntarstvo*, the typically pre-industrial form of village rebellion from which so many rural uprisings were born. Of the nearly 150,000 workers who entered the Petrograd labor force between 1914 and 1917, an estimated 50 to 70 per cent, or roughly 80,000, were peasants. These newly arrived peasant-workers were not the hereditary proletariat that Marx believed would be the hegemonic class in creating a new society. Indeed, few workers in the tsar's domains were so far removed from the countryside, as has been emphasized, that they had forgotten the riotous *buntarstvo* militancy that had been nourished in the village world for centuries.

Finally, Petrograd was not only a major industrial center of the imperial government; it was also a very important garrison city. Scattered over the city were thirteen barracks containing twelve combat regiments (two of which were Cossack units), armored car units, an engineer battalion, bicycle troops, machine-gunners, and the notorious Semenovskiy Regiment that had played a crucial role in putting down the 1905 insurrection in Moscow. More than 27,000 soldiers actually worked in government-owned munitions plants and other enterprises in the city. These men were under strict military discipline: not only were they subject to the everyday humiliation faced by ordinary soldiers, enduring degrading modes of address and personal treatment, but they could also be brought before courts-martial rather than civil courts for any real or supposed infraction of factory rules.

In the Petrograd garrison soldiers of all types—many of them held in reserve to put down civil disorders, others working as uniformed proletarians in the city's industrial districts, still others in transit to or from the front—ranged in numbers from 160,000 to more than 270,000 and were often quartered in the poorest parts of the capital. This huge force of disciplined men, largely peasant in origin, had been trained in or were familiar with the use of modern weapons. Their barracks were in close proximity to the workers' factories and

residences, which made them easy targets of radical political propaganda. Given the privileges accorded to the officers and the arrogant behavior that the ordinary soldiers had to endure, a genuine if hidden class war simmered in most of the barracks, one that was eventually to explode into the greatest military mutiny Russia had seen up to that time.

WARTIME DISCONTENTS

The repression that followed the tsar's declaration of war was swift and unrelenting. Social Democrats, particularly Bolsheviks, the capital's most intransigent anti-war activists, were quickly rounded up and sent either into the army or to Siberian exile. Thus Bolshevik membership in Petrograd fell from several thousand to barely one hundred in the months that followed. Strikes were outlawed; violators could receive sentences from several months to four years of hard labor. All the periodicals of the Internationalist Left—be they Bolshevik, Menshevik, or Socialist Revolutionary—were shut down; their city and district committees were arrested; and their grassroots networks were shredded by the police. The Bolshevik deputies to the Duma, led by Lev Kamenev, were obliged to stand trial for their Internationalist views and were eventually exiled to Siberia.

When remnants of the Bolshevik's Petersburg City Committee called for a strike to protest against the trial of the Bolshevik Duma deputation in February 1915, only 340 workers downed their tools in six factories. This humiliatingly small number of strikers reflects the temporary paralysis that silenced the capital's proletariat, due to its fear and its pro-war sentiments. Between August of 1914 and July 1915 only 45 political strikes took place in Petrograd, involving a mere 10,000 workers. Strikes over economic issues were more plentiful, but they rose slowly in number and reached serious proportions only a year after the outbreak of the war. The Petrograd proletariat had been cowed by the war for the time being.

But in the summer of 1915 the strike movement began to surge forward. In August 1915 alone about 24 political strikes, embracing more than 23,000 workers, occurred in Petrograd. On 10 August, textile workers in Ivanovo-Voznesensk were shot while demonstrating—30 were killed and 53 wounded. Like Bloody Sunday 1905, this atrocity produced a near-insurrectionary response: once the news reached Petrograd, a two-day protest strike erupted in the Vyborg, Narva, and Peterhof districts, bringing out more than 22,000 workers from 23 factories. Not only did they clash openly with the police—the hated 'pharaohs', as they were called—but newly recruited soldiers from the

Egersky Regiment sympathetically joined the workers, injuring twenty 'pharaohs' before being quelled by the military police.

The alarmed authorities made another sweep of Petrograd's radical network between late August and early September, arresting 30 of the most active Putilov metalworkers, 23 of whom were Bolsheviks, six SRs, and one Menshevik. But far from intimidating the movement, the police action provoked a full-scale citywide general strike, in which the workers not only demanded the release of the arrestees but raised new political and economic demands. In fact, as the strike movement increased day by day, an All-City Strike Committee was created to co-ordinate it. Within four days, more than 82,000 workers from 70 factories had downed their tools. The Strike Committee called for the formation of a Soviet of Workers' Deputies—the first one since 1905—to which various factories responded by electing deputies.

The prospect of a soviet and a possible insurrection apparently alarmed the Menshevik leaders, especially Chkheidze and Skobelev. Mindful of their 'errors' in 1905, the Mensheviks were frightened by the prospect of alienating the bourgeoisie, particularly members of the moderate liberals in the Duma's Progressive Bloc (headed by the Kadet Pavel Milyukov and the Octobrist leader and reform-minded industrialist, Alexander Guchkov). The Menshevik deputies joined Alexander Kerensky, a rising young deputy and leader of the moderate Duma SRs known as Trudoviks (Toilers), in visiting the factories and trying to induce the workers to return to their jobs. At an enlarged All-City Strike Committee meeting, most of its participants except for the Bolsheviks succumbed to Menshevik and Trudovik pleas for moderation. The socialist majority of the committee, led primarily by the Mensheviks, prudently called off the strike—validating Lenin's mistrust of a speciously united socialist party whose members had fundamentally different goals and analyses.

No less revealing of deep-seated differences among the Mensheviks, Bolsheviks and SRs were the conflicts fought over the issue of forming a Workers' Group as part of the Central War Industries Committee. The committee was a legal but non-governmental agency that had been formed on the initiative of reform-minded industrialists who tried to gain government war contracts for small Petrograd firms and provincial factory owners. In proposing to form a Workers' Group, the committee was eager to promote fairness in governmental military contracts as a means to enlist the support of workers; by ensuring labor participation, they believed, they could foster industrial peace under the expansive umbrella of patriotism.

The members of the Workers' Group were to be chosen from an elected collegium of proletarian deputies, each representing a thousand factory workers. The deputies, in turn, were to select a small committee to represent the workers as a whole. But what the workers found most appealing about the

proposed Workers' Group was the electoral procedure that made it possible for them to discuss their class problems without restraint and to gain a legal institution to promote their interests.

Of the three workers' parties that were expected to participate—Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and SRs—the Bolsheviks were most militantly opposed not only to the war but to any form of class collaboration. The 'Petersburg' Bolsheviks* decided to use the first stage of the indirect electoral process to campaign against the war and call for the overthrow of the autocracy. They would boycott the final electoral stage to express their refusal to collaborate with the bourgeoisie or the government. They also called for converting the Workers' Group into a Soviet of Workers' Deputies, falling back on the vivid memories of the Soviet of 1905. In this strategy they were supported by the left-wing or 'activist' tendency of the SRs (a collaboration that set a precedent for the more significant alliance in 1917 and early 1918). The Mensheviks, however, chose to follow the whole electoral process to its very end, even standing for election to the initial Workers' Group.

In the first electoral stage, held in September 1915, the 213,000 workers who voted chose 218 electors, of whom 60–70 were Bolsheviks, 80 were Mensheviks and SRs, and the remainder were unaffiliated. The Bolsheviks dutifully withdrew their candidates and boycotted the rest of the process. Accordingly, the Workers' Group that finally emerged from the elections was dominated by Mensheviks.¹ The Mensheviks, to be sure, expressly denied that they were following a class collaborationist policy or supporting the war. Rather, they declared, they planned to use the Workers' Group as a means of expressing the workers' class grievances and as a forum for propagandistic purposes. In practice, however, the Mensheviks had become averse to provoking or alienating their bourgeois allies, even lagging behind the anti-war sentiment that was spreading among the worker-militants. Clearly the Mensheviks had retreated from their militant position of 1905 and were functioning more like liberals than like revolutionaries.

Accordingly, they were more hesitant than ever fully to support proposals for strikes and demonstrations. Their dogmatic notion that the Russian labor movement must strive for a 'bourgeois democratic' regime was straitjacketing them into a fixed, doctrinaire position. Ensconcing themselves in quasi-legal bodies such as the Duma, the Workers' Group of the War Industries Committee, and various workers' cooperatives, they exuded an air of constructive gentility rather than insurrectionary fervor.

* The Bolsheviks' few committees in the capital retained the name 'Petersburg'—rather than 'Petrograd'—to defy the regime's attempt to foster anti-German sentiment among the population.

The Mensheviks' changing behavior ultimately benefited the prospects of the Bolsheviks. From a membership of only about 100 in the latter half of 1914, the capital's Bolsheviks grew to 2000 by September 1916 and to 3000 only five months later. The number of Bolshevik Party cells in Petrograd doubled from 55 in 1915 to 110 in January 1917. Lenin's associates now accepted the notion that only a revolution could remove the obstructions created by tsarism and install a modern constitutional government, and that such a revolution could succeed only with the support, indeed the leadership of militant workers and their organizations. Although the Petrograd workers as yet had very little knowledge of the disputes among Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and the various SRs, their more militant cadres learned to regard the socialist moderates with mistrust—which left them open to Lenin's strategic appeals.

THE GATHERING STORM

In 1916 strike waves were now following one upon another with ever-greater frequency. In January there were 68 strikes, involving 61,000 workers, mainly to commemorate the dead who had fallen in Bloody Sunday. It was followed by 51 in March that involved nearly 78,000 strikers, and a startling 77 in November, which brought out 170,000. All these strikes, let it be noted, were political in nature and were matched in number and size by economic strikes as well.

They expressed a resentment of the tsar's government, moreover, that rose in frequency as the months passed. During the Bloody Sunday memorial soldiers in a military truck belligerently drove their vehicle into a contingent of mounted police—to the cheers of the demonstrators. In October, during a demonstration near the barracks of the 181st Infantry Regiment, the 'pharaohs' attacked the protesters, which angered the soldiers nearby, who joined the demonstrators in a wild fracas against the police. The police might well have been trounced had the authorities not called in mounted Cossack detachments. One hundred and thirty soldiers were arrested after this incident, and the regiment was removed from the capital.

In the face of soaring prices, widespread hunger, governmental mismanagement at the rear as well as at the front, the fact that Petrograd workers struck in increasing numbers and that soldiers gave them occasional support should not have been very surprising—at least, so the authorities consoled themselves. The workers, after all, had raised no barricades, as they had in 1914, and the soldiers had not mutinied, as they had in 1905. Moreover, the authorities expected that the nearly 4000 police mobilized to cope with civil

unrest could handle the workers' strikes and the military episodes. The Cossack detachments, those privileged dragoons, were still loyal to the tsar, and the regiments stationed in the capital, such as the Semenovskiy—which had put down the Moscow 1905 uprising—were still reliable. These forces seemed more than enough to control any civilian 'disturbances', authorities reassured themselves: the police would handle any small disorders that might arise, the Cossacks would take on the more serious ones, and the regiments in and near the capital would suppress any incipient insurrection.

In August 1915 the tsar personally assumed command of his demoralized army, demonstratively moving his residence from Petrograd to Moghilev, the city on the Dnieper River in Belorussia where the Supreme Command or Stavka was installed. This gesture was apparently meant to reassure the Russian people that military affairs were in good hands. But this gesture failed miserably. Nicholas's subjects felt no safer under his guidance than they had under previous army commanders. Moreover, by moving to Moghilev, the emperor simply shifted the blame for the army's failure to vanquish the Germans from his commanders' shoulders on to his own. In performing the onerous job of commander-in-chief of the army Nicholas was out of his depth. The tsar simply loitered around Moghilev and raised his flagging spirits with braided, spoiled and obsequious officers who shielded him from any expression of popular discontent.

When Nicholas left Petrograd for Moghilev, he placed civil affairs in the incompetent hands of his wife Alexandra, her 'holy man' Rasputin, and the self-serving, corrupt court camarilla that had formed around the pair. The wilful, mystical empress took control of the government and appointed ministers and officers to key imperial positions—appalling the more rational figures in the tsar's service. Alexandra was not only grossly incompetent and hopelessly paranoid; she was even more of a tyrant than her husband. Domineering toward her imperial husband, she in turn was dominated by a rapacious Siberian monk, drunkard, and womanizer, Rasputin. Rasputin had used hypnosis to arrest the hemophiliac bleeding of the young heir to the throne, the tsarevich, which made him seem to Alexandra's eyes a miracle worker. Worse, it had earned him the power to play a decisive role in governing the empire and peopling its leadership with rogues.

Recalling all too vividly the events of 1905, the Duma's liberals, in letters and petitions, implored the tsar to make the ministerial and military changes that were visibly necessary to salvage the crumbling empire. Guided by his wife and her 'holy man', Nicholas simply replaced one incompetent minister with an even more incompetent successor. The nobility was equally unable to influence events: even the grand dukes were shut out from the inner counsels of the tsar's immediate family. The court seethed with anger and impotence. In

late December 1916 youthful nobles succeeded in murdering Rasputin—but his removal did nothing to change the course of events leading to revolution. The Kadet leader Milyukov tried to rouse the lethargic monarchy with a stormy address from the rostrum of the Duma, hinting at treason (that is, by the German-born tsarina), but he soon lapsed into a hopeless fatalism about the autocracy's inadequacies.

At the end of 1916 the empire's wartime losses and class hatreds had soared to intolerable proportions. The specific economic dislocations facing Russia would have undermined the stability of any modern nation, even in peacetime. Indeed, had the tsar consulted the statistics that his own Ministry of Interior collected instead of reading the patriotic claptrap that emanated from his War Ministry's press, he could justifiably have panicked over the future of the dynasty. These statistics would have told him that the currency of his realm was becoming worthless; the number of rubles in circulation in the last half of 1916 had leaped more than threefold, from about 2.5 billion to nearly 8 billion, while the prices of goods had risen on the overall about threefold in less than four years. By contrast, average wages had only doubled, leaving the urban lower classes in sheer destitution. Petrograd was facing a famine. It was receiving only a third of the food supplies needed to keep its lower classes alive and only half of the fuel it needed to operate its industries, warm its homes, and fire its bakeries. Food prices edged steadily upward—that is, where food was still available. In a brief two months, from 16 December 1916, to February 1917, the price of such basic staples as potatoes and bread rose 25 and 15 per cent respectively. Cabbages rose in cost by 25 per cent, and the remaining goods soared beyond the reach of even fairly well-paid wage earners, let alone poor ones. A secret police agent reported that:

Resentment is felt worse in large families, where children are starving in the most literal sense of the word, and where no other words are heard except, 'Peace, immediate peace, peace at all costs.' And these mothers, exhausted from standing endlessly at the tail of queues, and having suffered so much in watching their half-starving and sick children, are perhaps much closer to a revolution than [the liberal Duma deputies] Messrs. Miliukov, Rodichev and Co., and of course, they are much more dangerous, since they are the stockpiles of flammable material, needing only a spark to set them afire.²

The winter of 1916–17 in the capital was one of the coldest on record, with average temperatures registering 12 degrees below zero (centigrade) and huge blizzards blocking the transportation of direly needed supplies into the capital. By late February 1917 the long queues that normally gathered in the freezing morning hours before the city's bakeries were rife with rumors that the gov-

ernment was planning to limit the bread ration to only one loaf per adult. Factories, lacking fuel, began to close down, leaving thousands of workers free to mill around the depressed neighborhoods or fill the proletarian taverns, heightening the feelings of class hostility that were spreading through the city's industrial districts. Despite the frigid weather, the political temperature in Petrograd was rising to boiling point. Only a mere incident was needed to plunge the capital into an outright mass insurrection.

THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

On 23 February many of the factories and shipyards in Petrograd were closed because of strikes, punitive lockouts, or a lack of raw materials. The strikes were quite disconnected from one another: they were started or led mainly by factory militants, not by the revolutionary parties, in response to the specific needs of their fellow proletarians. The Bolsheviks' Petersburg City Committee played no role in the events under way. In fact, most members of the committee had recently been jailed as a result of police raids, and the party press was closed down by the police. Only the Russian Bureau of the Central Committee*—the highest Bolshevik committee within Russia—was available for leadership. It was headed by the metalworker Alexander Shliapnikov, along with his two subordinates, the young Vyacheslav Molotov and I. Zalutsky. Shliapnikov seemed almost indifferent to the ferment in the capital and persisted in viewing the strikes as narrowly economic and politically inconsequential. Even when great masses of workers began to take to the streets and shootings occurred between the masses and the 'pharaohs', he tended to dismiss their importance and seemed to be convinced that the troops would easily bring them to an end. The authority for mobilizing the party as an active force during February thus fell to the capital's district committees, especially

* The Bolshevik Central Committee, it will be recalled, was divided into a Foreign Bureau and a Russian Bureau. The Russian Bureau was composed mainly of 'practicals', responsible for the party's day-to-day affairs in the homeland, in contrast to the ideologically oriented Foreign Bureau living abroad. In February 1917 the Foreign Bureau consisted mainly of Lenin and Gregory Zinoviev in Switzerland, while the Russian Bureau was led by Alexander Shliapnikov, the most senior Bolshevik who was still at liberty in the country. In theory, the Russian Bureau had as much authority as the Foreign Bureau, but Lenin's voice obviously counted for more—he was, after all, the founder of Bolshevism. After 1915, the two halves of the Central Committee were not in close communication with each other, and positions that Lenin was abandoning were unknown to the Russian Bureau and its lower organs.

the Vyborg District Committee, whose members were eager to go the whole way and overthrow the autocracy.

International Women's Day was on 23 February, a radical holiday that had been proclaimed by the Second International in 1910 on the initiative of Clara Zetkin, a close comrade of Rosa Luxemburg. Before textile plants in the Vyborg District, worker-militants and left-leaning Social Democrats staged mass meetings celebrating the holiday (which was still a novelty in the Russian revolutionary movement and did not evoke great emotions). They denounced the war and the terrible food shortages that affected the city, but their oratory did not have to be overheated to stoke up the extreme bitterness of the textile workers. These workers, most of whom were women, were obliged to work thirteen hours a day for scandalously low wages in the capital, and they daily witnessed the growing hunger faced by their families as well as the abusive behavior of their overseers.

Inspired partly by the holiday and partly by their economic burdens, the women in the textile mills decided to strike. They were supported by many young unemployed male workers who were loitering in the streets and cafés. In growing numbers the strikers and unemployed youths filled the streets of the Vyborg crying 'Bread!' and denouncing the war. The women challenged the employed men, particularly the metalworkers, to come out and join them. Bolshevik leaders, in turn, tried to restrain the metalworkers, fearful that the situation was not sufficiently ripe to engage the authorities. But the crowds of infuriated women and their cries were too combustible for the men to ignore. Soon metalworkers flooded the streets, going from plant to plant to induce others to join them or, in some cases, simply forcing them to close down their plants. Whether out of enthusiasm, despair, or simply moral coercion, nearly 60,000 workers and 30 large plants stopped working in the Vyborg District; they were followed by a smaller number in the Petrograd District and were soon joined by the Putilov workers, who had been locked out of their Narva District plant the day after a strike.

By the early afternoon, tens of thousands of workers were marching toward the center of the city, transforming an inchoate movement into an overt political demonstration against the autocracy. Workers pressed against police lines, trying to force their way across the bridges leading from the suburbs into Petrograd's center. The police had all they could do to hold their own ground and restrain demonstrators without recourse to firearms—whose use the government had explicitly forbidden. The workers, in turn, soon sensed that the troops were not averse to their demonstration. One Cossack troop, on orders to charge a crowd, moved almost lackadaisically and came to a full stop without charging into the workers. This reluctance did not escape the notice of the crowd, which realized that these ordinarily brutal horsemen were passively

on their side. Nor did the incident escape the notice of the secret police, who reported the event for posterity.

At nightfall on the 23rd the demonstrators withdrew to their districts, leaving the center of the city deserted. But the working-class suburbs were alive with discussions, arguments, and plans to continue, indeed expand the day's strikes and demonstrations. The unwillingness of Cossacks to attack the workers, limited as it was, undoubtedly played a major role in raising their hopes for success and in encouraging them to press harder the next day to test the government's authority. Thus did a sudden women's strike for 'bread' become an attempt to bring down a centuries-old autocracy.

The Bolsheviks' Vyborg District Committee now raced ahead of the cautious Petersburg City Committee, and its boldness began to override the higher committee's qualms. That evening, acting in defiance of the wishes of its own City Committee, the Vyborg Bolsheviks called for a three-day general strike, thereby opening a new stage in what was seemingly a protest movement. While the City Committee's principal leaders still regarded the strike call as premature, even adventuristic, the Vyborgers brought together the galvanized but inexperienced masses, providing them with guidance and palpable goals.

By the next day, even the normally reticent Mensheviks decided to act conjointly with the Vyborg Bolsheviks. The cold, overcast daybreak of 24 February was charged with excitement in the working-class districts. Orators appeared everywhere, not only from the socialist organizations but from the faceless ranks of the proletariat itself, stirring the workers to use every means at their disposal—from rocks to bolts, screws and tools—in confrontations with the police. At the New Lessner, Erikson, Parviainen and Russian Renault plants, contingents of Bolshevik agitators and worker-militants closed down the remaining Vyborg factories, bringing out 75,000 workers from 61 plants.

At the Sampsonievsky Prospect, which lay just before the Liteinyi Bridge, linking the Vyborg District with the city center, the authorities mobilized two and a half companies of Cossacks, two companies of the Moscow Regiment, and police contingents to cope with the inevitable march into the city proper. It began at nine o'clock that morning, when some 40,000 workers and sympathizers and some 2500 Erikson workers converged at the bridge, face to face with the Cossacks. The Cossacks were ordered to charge into the crowd, but to everyone's astonishment, they passively trotted their horses in swaths behind their mounted officers, leaving the demonstrators virtually untouched. In the exultant words of the Bolshevik Kayurov: 'Some of [the Cossacks] smiled; and one of them even winked at the workers.'³ In his vivid account of the 'five days' that brought down the 300-year-old dynasty, Trotsky shrewdly observed:

This wink was not without meaning. The workers were emboldened with a friendly, not hostile, kind of assurance, and slightly infected the Cossacks with it. The one who winked found imitators. In spite of renewed efforts from the officers, the Cossacks, without openly breaking discipline, failed to force the crowd to disperse, but flowed through it in streams. This was repeated three or four times and brought the two sides even closer together. Individual Cossacks began to reply to the workers' questions and even enter into momentary conversations with them.⁴

While the Cossacks preserved their neutrality, the mounted police 'pharaohs' charged the crowd in a frenzy and dispersed it. About 5000 workers managed to cross the icy Neva River, but waiting police detachments scattered them all over the city. By now the strike had spread throughout Petrograd and all its environs, bringing out unprecedented numbers of workers who furiously engaged the police in nearly every part of the capital. At Kazan Square in the city center at least four rallies followed upon one another until Cossacks and army cavalry finally cleared the area. At Znamensky Square a mass rally was held before the huge statue of Alexander III, while Cossacks and police impassively stood by. A platoon of the Volynsky Guard Regiment, sent to disperse the crowd, allowed the workers to pass on the sidewalk unharassed. Nearly everywhere the street demonstrators were cheered by bystanders, neighborhood residents, and even wounded soldiers who waved to them from hospital windows. As the last demonstrators, flushed with success, finally left the Nevsky Prospect—Petrograd's main avenue—they declared that they would return in even greater numbers the next day.

But his pledge was uncertain. The workers were showing signs of weariness, and the Petrograd military command would undoubtedly strike back more vigorously if events got out of control. During the night of 24–25 February members of the Bolshevik Russian Bureau, led by Shliapnikov, still opposed a call for an insurrection as premature. It remained for a small internationalist Social Democratic group, the *mezhrayontsy* (Interdistrict-ers), who were committed to unity between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, to circulate a manifesto calling for an uprising and a democratic republic. Vague as the manifesto's demands were, they buoyed the spirits of the workers and suggested that a firm hand guided the masses.

At the factory level party differences among Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and SRs began to give way to a sense of common purpose and unity of action. With few exceptions all socialists were now engaged in propagandizing the workers and reaching out to the soldiers. The next morning, 25 February—a Saturday—saw a dramatic broadening of the strike: more than 200,000 workers downed their tools and headed again for the center of the capital. At the

Liteinyi Bridge the Cossacks abandoned their posts to the workers, who streamed into the city center unimpeded. At the Nikolaevsky Bridge, which linked Vasilievsky Island with Petrograd's center, a platoon of Don Cossacks, the cream of the tsar's mounted forces, impassively permitted a crowd of workers to cross into the city, ignoring the Island's military commander's frantic orders to stop them. Still another Cossack detachment permitted a crowd to free detainees who had been arrested by the 'pharaohs' in a nearby building. To the cheers of the surrounding crowd, the Cossacks actually chased away the police guards with insults and freed the detainees themselves.

Perhaps the most dramatic incident of the day occurred in the late afternoon at Znamensky Square. Here mounted police attacked a rally and dispersed the people in all directions while a Cossack detachment sedately stood by. When a few bold workers, caps in hand, approached them with pleas for help, the Cossacks suddenly charged the police with their sabers unsheathed and dispersed them, leaving the commanding police inspector dead in the snow. Nor were the Cossacks alone in their partisanship. Demonstrators who confronted troop contingents across the Nevsky Prospect appealed to the soldiers for their support. The soldiers raised their bayoneted rifles—then broke ranks and melted into the crowd. Other soldiers in the city center, however—many of them non-commissioned officers being groomed for higher positions—fired at demonstrators and left a scattering of dead civilians in the streets.

Meanwhile the working-class suburbs, particularly the Vyborg, were inflamed by feelings of revolt. Everywhere the 'pharaohs' were disarmed and beaten. Police stations were attacked and stripped of their weapons. The city was paralyzed by the general strike. Trams, cabs, even ordinary vehicles were nowhere to be seen; printing presses, banks, business offices, stores, and government buildings were closed down. The universities were empty, cafés and restaurants were closed, postal deliveries came to a halt, and water and gas works were no longer in operation. Crowds surged through the great avenues of Petrograd, singing revolutionary songs, waving red flags, and carrying banners calling for an end to the war and the autocracy. In fact, Petrograd had seen nothing like the fever that now gripped the city since 1905, when the very existence of the monarchy hung in the balance.

The Petrograd workers had now committed themselves to an insurrection that could only be put down by troops. But the workers alone could not overthrow the government. They needed the support of the middle-class population—and above all the full support of the troops themselves. With only small quantities of weapons at their disposal, the workers were incapable of meeting trained soldiers in open combat. The fundamental question was: Would the soldiers go over to the people? Would they undertake a huge military mutiny?

The authorities seemed to understand that the very existence of the autocracy was being challenged and shifted to the worst possible recourse: the use of ordinary soldiers against the people. During the night and early morning the Petrograd military governor, General Khabalov, turned the city center into an armed camp. All the major intersections were occupied by pickets of troops, reinforced by machine-gun nests. Detachments of soldiers were deployed to guard public buildings, railroad stations, and bridgeheads. Cavalry contingents patrolled the avenues, and scattered groups of sentinels checked the papers of all passing civilians.

The next day, 26 February, opened as a bright and crisp Sunday. The high-echelon Bolshevik and Menshevik leaders alike thought the military forces that Khabalov had assembled spelled the end of the uprising. Astonishingly, they thought that the better part of wisdom would be to call off the strike. But the Petrograd proletariat was so impassioned that it seemed to have lost all sense of danger. For reasons that are difficult to explain, workers again assembled in the streets and made their way across the icy Neva to the Nevsky Prospect.

As the crowd marching along the Nevsky reached its intersections with the Vladimir Prospect and Sadovaya Street, detachments of the Semenovskiy Regiment inauspiciously opened fire. Elsewhere, in Znamenskiy Square, a training detachment of the Volynskiy Guard Regiment unexpectedly fired on a crowd, as did troops elsewhere. But the crowds persisted in their demonstration, scattering and regrouping with resolute determination to shatter the discipline that still held the troops under the command of their officers. Somehow the demonstrators must have sensed that the military forces were undergoing a major change in outlook; the discipline that held many soldiers together was actually beginning to unravel. Nikolai Sukhanov, the Menshevik-Internationalist who observed their behavior, noted that many of the military patrols

had a rather casual, unserious, and unreal character. Both the cordons and patrols looked as though they were hoping for organized attacks on themselves and seeking an occasion to surrender. Single policemen had long since completely vanished. The patrols, who were not marching but strolling around the city, were as a matter of fact disarmed [by the demonstrators] in many places without offering serious resistance. . . . In spite of the presence of an officer, [a cordon of Grenadiers] were standing easy and conversing animatedly with the crowd on political topics. Agitators were haranguing them in quite unambiguous terms. Some soldiers were chuckling, others were listening in attentive silence. . . . There was no direct insubordination, but they were obviously unsuitable material for any active operations, and there was clearly nothing for the officers to do but turn a blind eye on this scene of 'corruption.'

The uprising's militants now knew that events would reach their decisive stage the next day. If the soldiers opened fire on the workers and their supporters, the workers would have to retreat to their homes in defeat. But it was also possible that the soldiers would lower their weapons and go over to the crowds.

When the members of the Bolsheviks' Vyborg District Committee met that night, they seemed inclined to call off the next day's action. But at the same time meetings, even rallies, were occurring everywhere in the workers' suburbs, and here the workers were plainly elated. They had noticed the nonchalant behavior of the troops; under the very eyes of their officers, and many military cordons and patrols had freely talked with the workers. Militants and ordinary workers argued, compared experiences, and formed judgements about the next day. A meeting of Bolshevik worker-militants and *mezhrayontsy* on Vasilievsky Island resolved that the workers should not only continue the strike but extend it further and collect weapons to create a workers' militia. All that stood between the state and a successful popular rising, they were convinced, were the embittered peasants in military greatcoats who comprised most of the Petrograd garrison.

Unknown to the socialist leaders and the workers alike, the bonds of military discipline that had kept the garrison harnessed to the regime were being severed. The lenience of the Cossack detachments had been unnerving enough to the authorities, but the reluctance of troops to fire on the people had produced growing alarm at the headquarters of the Petrograd military command. Most alarmingly, workers had even felt free, at day's end, to rush to the barracks of the Pavlovsky Regiment and inform them that their training detachment (among others) had fired upon demonstrators in the Nevsky Prospect. Outraged by this news, the Fourth Company of the *pavlovtsy* left its barracks to stop the training detachment, then found itself in a fire-fight with mounted police. Bereft of weapons, the soldiers returned to their barracks to incite other companies in their regiment to rebellion. The ringleaders of the mutiny were soon surrounded by loyal troops and duly imprisoned, but it was found that 21 armed men were missing. They probably took refuge in the working-class districts. Each of these soldiers, in effect, was an agitator desperate for an uprising and, as soldiers, could talk freely to others who shared his uniform. The army, no less than the workers, the Cossacks, and the police, was primed for a break with the government.

During the night of 26 February the training detachments of the Volynsky Regiment that had fired on demonstrators hours earlier decided to mutiny and go over to the people. Led by Sergeant T. Kirpichnikov, they secretly commandeered the regiment's weapons, including machine guns. After lining up for reveille the next morning, they had an altercation with a junior officer

(which cost him his life), then ran in squad formation to other soldiers of the regiment. By nine a.m. the next day—Monday, 27 February—they reached the nearby Preobrazhensky and Lithuanian Regiments, who finally decided to join them. Soon the Sixth Engineer Battalion and mutinous troops from other barracks along the way joined forces and appeared on the Nevsky Prospect fully armed, where they encountered cheering crowds of workers and (no trivial fact) middle-class people. Armed soldiers and workers, in turn, plundered tens of thousands of weapons from the Arsenal and other military storehouses. By nightfall revolutionary troops and scattered armored cars appeared in the broad avenues of the city, and the dwindling holdouts soon surrendered to their revolutionary besiegers. As Tsuyoshi Hasegawa observes:

The soldiers' insurrection that began in Volynskii Regiment early in the morning thus involved practically all the military units in Petrograd by the end of February 27. It is estimated that the participants in the soldiers' insurrection rose from 10,200 in the morning to 25,700 in the afternoon, and to 66,700 by evening. It further grew in the morning of February 28 to 72,000, by afternoon to 112,000, and in the evening, 127,000. By the afternoon of March 1, almost the entire garrison, 170,000 soldiers, took the side of the revolution.⁶

THE END OF TSARDOM

By 1917 imperial Russia's bureaucratic-military complex had become such a lifeless archaism that it simply could not grasp what was happening to the country it ruled. That it had survived the 1905 Revolution—for twelve years—was due more to the inertia of the peasant masses, the product of centuries of subservience, than to any vitality of the tsarist regime. If the autocracy could not bend to historic social changes that were sweeping Europe, it would have to collapse in the hurricane that assailed it in late February. Fearful as the February revolutionaries were of counter-revolutionary troops outside the capital, the generals at the front and at military headquarters seemed as depleted of will as the tsar himself, who was eager only to get to his family in Tsarskoye Selo. Career military officers seemed concerned primarily with retaining their positions and did almost nothing to aid the obviously defunct regime. Informed of the Petrograd rising, Moscow simply tipped over and fell into line, to be followed during the next few days by provincial capitals, cities, and towns across the empire. When the authorities tallied up the victims of the Petrograd rising, they found that fewer than 1500 people had been killed or

wounded, 869 of whom were soldiers. By comparison with other major uprisings, Russia's 'first revolution', which brushed away a centuries-old autocratic state, was comparatively bloodless—which, more than any other fact, revealed that it had been moribund for years and was merely awaiting an appropriate burial.

The uprising of February 1917 was a political insurrection, not a social revolution. The social problems that had induced the workers to go into the streets and the soldiers to mutiny remained unresolved. The war was still going on; agrarian problems remained ubiquitous; employers still exploited their workers; and even the difficulties of feeding the capital were as overwhelming as ever, exacerbated by the presence of tens of thousands of hungry and armed soldiers. Now that the autocracy had been overthrown, what institutions would take its place? Who would lead the centralized, bureaucratic empire that had kept millions of people, including non-Russians, in chains for centuries? Would the war continue? Would the conflicting classes—bourgeois and proletarian, landlord and peasant—unite, after February, to defend the empire against Prussian militarism? Or would the war end in a separate peace? The next few months would reveal the enormous difficulty of answering most of these questions, as well as the inertia that paralyzed the revolutionary leaders to whom the masses turned for guidance.

NOTES

1. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd, 1917* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1981), p. 114.
2. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 201.
3. The Kayurov quotation is a slight modification of the one in Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1932), p. 1:104.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 1:104–5. I have compared Trotsky's brilliant but tendentious account against Hasegawa's scholarly history and used material from the Bolshevik writer's work only if the historian substantiates it.
5. N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917: A Personal Record*, ed. and trans. Joel Carmichael (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 26, 27.
6. Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, p. 292.

CHAPTER 44 The Soviets in Power

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

The insurgency of the Petrograd workers, it need hardly be said, terrified the capital's upper classes. On 14 February, to cope with the city's growing unrest, Nicholas convened the Duma, but then on 26 February, the third day of the strike movement, he inexplicably prorogued it, telling the deputies to leave Petrograd and return to their homes and estates. In so doing the tsar left Russia bereft of any legitimate legislative body. The Duma deputies were astonished by the prorogation—a *de facto* abolition of their institution—but amid the revolutionary upheaval they were undecided on how to respond. On the one hand, they could obey the emperor's order to abandon the city, leaving its political fate to the workers and soldiers. On the other hand, they could meet regardless of the tsar and deal with the situation—but that would mean defying Nicholas's decree and aligning themselves with the insurgents (which would have disastrous repercussions for them personally, should the monarchy survive the upheaval). Most of the conservative deputies chose to obey Nicholas and beat a hasty retreat. That left the members of the Progressive Bloc and the constitutional monarchists to confront the crisis. On the afternoon of 27 February about one-third of the former Duma deputies met in an informal session and selected a Duma Committee. They chose an assortment of members from across the political spectrum, including two socialists, the Trudovik Alexander Kerensky and the Menshevik Nikolai Chkheidze.

The cumbersome full name of the Duma Committee—'Provisional Committee of Duma Members for the Restoration of Order in the Capital and the Establishment of Relations with Public Organizations and Institutions'—was no accident. Panicked both by the insurrection and by Nicholas's decree, the remaining Duma members were unsure whether power lay with the tsar or with the people. Accordingly they designed the Duma Committee to be able

either to keep the revolution under control, should it succeed in changing the government, or to negotiate with a counter-revolution, should the tsar prevail over the insurrection.

Later that day, when news reached the Committee that the Preobrazhensky Regiment had ceased to be at the tsar's disposal, the Committee nervously decided to take power. The Kadet leader Milyukov, the Committee's informal head, was intent on keeping Russia a monarchy and cautiously sought to restore order in the capital and keep a Romanov on the throne. On 1–2 March the Duma Committee agreed that the tsar should abdicate in favor of his son, under the regency of the Grand Duke Michael. The Committee actually had no authority of its own to offer the throne to the reluctant grand duke, who wisely rejected the risky honor. Nicholas, for his part, seemed to be sleepwalking through his dynasty's ultimate crisis. First he demanded the outright military suppression of the insurrection; then he agreed to accept a constitutional monarchy; and finally, 'encouraged' by nervous generals, he acknowledged that a new provisional government was the only alternative to anarchy in Russia.

Nicholas, however, again offered too little too late. The remains of shattered royal insignias that abounded in the streets of the capital made it eminently clear that the masses would not allow the autocracy to continue to rule Russia, let alone with a Romanov on the throne. As he met with emissaries from the Duma Committee and consulted with his more trusted military advisers, it was plain to the emperor that his own supporters were eager to see him removed. Nicholas's capacity to influence events had become so minuscule that his abdication on 2 March was almost a mundane event. With little ceremony the tsar and his family were temporarily placed under house arrest in his palace in Tsarskoe Selo.

With the abdication of the emperor, the Duma Committee had to create a legally responsible provisional government if it was to prevent the immense tide of political change from creating a radically democratic government beyond the control of the bourgeoisie and landowners. In a negotiating session that began at midnight on 1 March, the Duma Committee delegates (headed by Milyukov) and a Soviet delegation (headed by Chkheidze) met and hammered out an eight-point program to establish a provisional government that would run the state until such time as a constituent assembly could be convoked. With this program as its basis, the new government intended to (1) offer amnesty to all political prisoners; (2) guarantee freedom of speech, assembly, and association, including the right to form unions and engage in strikes; (3) abolish all privileges based on national, religious, and social status; (4) prepare for the convocation of a constituent assembly; (5) replace the police force with a militia whose officers would be elected; (6) provide for

elections for new organs of municipal self-government, by a 'four-tailed' suffrage (universal, secret, direct, and equal voting); (7) ensure that insurgent military units in Petrograd would keep their weapons and would not be sent to the front; and finally (8) give all off-duty soldiers the right to enjoy the freedoms possessed by civilians. Finally Milyukov drew up a list of ministers to fill the positions of the proposed government. All of these measures were undertaken without any public involvement—indeed, behind the back of the Revolution.

With a Provisional Government in place, Milyukov now needed to somehow gain a semblance of popular consent for its existence. His strategy was simple. An anonymous crowd of 'the people' had gathered in the Catherine Hall of the Tauride Palace 'for the purposes of information' (as the Menshevik-Internationalist Nikolai Sukhanov later put it). Milyukov, passing by the hall, felicitously chanced to encounter them. In a sudden burst of inspiration he decided to regard the crowd as a sample of the revolutionary people. He announced that a new government had been formed, described its structure and ministers, and then simply asked for their approval.

The 'people', however, were not nearly as accommodating as Milyukov had hoped.

'Who elected you?' was one rather difficult question, to which the answer had to be given that no one had elected anyone, that there was no time for elections, that the 'revolution' had done the electing. When Miliukov called [the proposed] Premier [G.E.] Lvov the incarnation of Russian 'society' oppressed by the Tsarist regime, an exclamation was heard from the crowd: 'Propertied society!'

The whole program and list of ministers might have been discarded then and there had Milyukov not mentioned that Alexander Kerensky would be minister of justice. 'I have just received,' he said, 'the consent of my colleague A.F. Kerensky to occupy the post of Minister of Justice in the first people's Cabinet, in which he will mete out just retribution to all the servants of the old régime.'¹ The 'people' naïvely greeted this news with 'thunderous applause'. Kerensky, widely known to the masses for his opposition to the autocracy, would undoubtedly declare a general amnesty, it was assumed, for all political prisoners at home and expatriates abroad, an issue that was of paramount importance to the capital's residents. Once Milyukov mentioned Kerensky's name, the crowd agreed to accept the rest of the program with little complaint.

That single, *ad hoc* encounter made up the ratification process in its entirety. The Provisional Government was thereby created and endowed with

all the privileges and status of the governing power of the land. The Allied powers eagerly recognized it as the legitimate Russian state. That its legitimacy had been granted by a heckling crowd of 'the people', whom the ministers would normally disdain, seemed to disturb no one in those chaotic days. Put bluntly: the Provisional Government had been created to prevent the masses from establishing a radically democratic government outside the control of the bourgeoisie. Months later the complaint would be raised that the Bolsheviks had 'illegitimately' seized power from Russia's 'legitimate' government—yet the Provisional Government was virtually a *coup d'état* carried out by Milyukov, with the co-operation of the Menshevik-controlled Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet.

Its members were a gray list of bourgeois liberals: the *zemstvo* leader and landowner Prince G.E. Lvov would be the official head of the government, acting as chairman of the Council of Ministers; Milyukov was its minister of foreign affairs; Kerensky, its minister of justice; Nekrasov, its minister of transport; and the industrialist Guchkov, its minister of war, to cite the principal figures. Hand-picked by Milyukov, its eminence grise, this cabal held power primarily by virtue of the presence of Kerensky.

Still, after casting aside a four-centuries-old semi-Asiatic autocracy in less than a week of street fighting, the February Revolution catapulted Russia into the freest liberal democracy in the Western world. In March 1917 the Provisional Government would institute a series of progressive reforms that had few equals in modern European history. It granted a package of civil liberties that included guarantees of freedom of speech, press, and assembly, as well as the right to form trade unions and declare strikes—this in the midst of a bloody war. A large section of the proletariat was given the eight-hour day. It abolished the death penalty and declared an amnesty for all political prisoners, thereby opening Russia to the return of politically incendiary revolutionaries. It eliminated legal inequalities based on race, religion, and legal status, granting Jews civil rights for the first time in Russian history. It granted national minorities varying degrees of autonomy, and it gave Poland, after generations of sanguinary struggle, its independence.

THE FORMATION OF THE PETROGRAD SOVIET

The real power in the capital, however, lay not with the Provisional Government but with the newly formed Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. The Soviet had obvious roots in the soviets of 1905. During the brief general strike in Petrograd in 1915, it will be recalled, Bolshevik worker-

militants had also raised the demand for a soviet,* and it was echoed again in the January 1917 general strike. On 24 February, even before the Petrograd Soviet came into existence, the workers in several factories (the Franco-Russian and Promet plants) elected delegates to form a soviet. Before Nicholas prorogued the Duma, these delegates met with the Menshevik Duma members to demand that a soviet be organized. The next day, whether in reaction to these workers or on their own initiative, the Menshevik deputies did precisely that: a party meeting agreed to organize a soviet and called a meeting for 26 February at the headquarters of the Petrograd Union of Workers' Cooperatives. Before that meeting could be held, however, the police rounded up more than half the delegates, and the formation of the soviet was stalled.

The definitive step toward forming the Petrograd Soviet occurred on 27 February, when insurgent crowds freed several imprisoned members of the Workers' Group of the War Industries Committee. On the same day several leaders of the Group—notably K. Gvozdev, B. Bogdanov, and G. Breido—quickly made their way across town to the Tauride Palace, where the Duma sessions had been held. There they encountered Chkheidze and Kerensky, who arranged to set aside a room for their common use. These socialists 'immediately formed a Provisional Executive Committee,' as Tsuyoshi Hasegawa notes, whose purpose was to organize a Petrograd Soviet.²

The self-appointed 'Provisional Executive' that met consisted of the Mensheviks Chkheidze, Volkov, Grinevich, Gvozdev and Bogdanov; and the non-party intellectuals Kapelinsky, Frankorussky, Sukhanov and N. Sokolov. The Petrograd Soviet thus began as a committee that had a moderate socialist orientation. At two o'clock that afternoon these members issued an appeal to Petrograd's 'citizens', calling on them to assemble at seven that evening at the Tauride Palace and elect delegates to what would become a soviet (although the word did not appear in the appeal). Soldiers were to elect one deputy for each infantry company (about 250 soldiers), one for each thousand workers in the large factories, and one for each agglomeration of small factories whose workers collectively totaled a thousand, which thereby gave a huge majority to the peasant-soldiers.

The Mensheviks and their allies were not alone on 27 February in the effort to form a soviet. A number of groups were racing to create the institution;

* In 1915 Menshevik deputies to the Duma—most conspicuously Chkheidze—had opposed both the general strike and the demand for a soviet, because the situation, they believed, was not 'ripe' for openly challenging the authorities. Now two years later, ironically, Chkheidze was the head of the soviet delegation negotiating with Milyukov over ways to legitimize the bourgeois Provisional Government's custody of a revolution that he had done nothing to foster.

indeed, the competition among them was nip-and-tuck. In the early afternoon, while the Mensheviks were conferring in the Tauride Palace, the revolutionary *mezhrayontsy* and their radical Socialist Revolutionary allies were meeting at their headquarters, where they unanimously agreed to issue an appeal for an insurrection and the formation of a soviet. In fact, the *mezhrayontsy* were almost certainly the first socialist tendency to raise the demand for both an uprising and a soviet.

The *mezhrayonts* appeal for a soviet of workers' deputies was patently an attempt to make the Soviet into a 'provisional revolutionary government'—a soviet with governmental powers.³ This strategy was more radical than that of the Mensheviks, who seemed to be endeavoring to avoid the creation of a proletarian revolutionary government. During the evening of 27 February the *mezhrayontsy* and their allies distributed 30,000 copies of their appeal throughout the capital, but by this time, at nine o'clock, the Mensheviks were already holding their own soviet plenary in the Tauride, pre-empting the *mezhrayontsy* effort.

Both the Mensheviks and the *mezhrayontsy*, however, had outpaced the Bolshevik leaders, who continued to underestimate the importance of the soviets. In an October 1915 article Lenin had opposed the Petersburg Bolsheviks' demand for a soviet, warning that it should be created only 'in connection with the development of a mass political strike'⁴ and not as an institution around which to build a revolutionary regime. On 25 February the Russian Bureau of the Bolsheviks issued a leaflet that echoed Lenin's view, declaring that soviets were instruments of struggle, not forms of self-governance. It called upon the workers to create specifically Bolshevik committees in the factories and in the city's districts—a demand that must have seemed more like a recruitment drive for the party than a call to serious confrontation. The leaflet went so far as to demand that such committees had to subordinate themselves to the party's Petersburg City Committee, which all but prevented Bolsheviks from participating in non-party mass organizations.* The Bureau seems to have viewed the February Revolution strictly as a party affair, to be conducted by party committees under direct Bolshevik leadership—a view it derived from Lenin's organizational writings.

By no means, however, did all the Bolsheviks in Petrograd support this highly sectarian policy. On the same day that the Mensheviks were organizing the Soviet in the Tauride Palace, the Vyborg District Committee, which was subordinated to the party's City Committee, called upon the strikers to elect

* The Bolsheviks' City Committee, it should be recalled, retained the name 'Petersburg' instead of shifting to 'Petrograd' because it despised the chauvinism that motivated the autocracy's name changes once war broke out.

deputies to a soviet. It was to be convened at the spacious Finland Station and form the basis for a provisional revolutionary government. The committee's leaflet declared that the workers should 'start immediately ... elections to the factory strike committees. Their representatives will compose the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, which will create a Provisional Revolutionary Government.'⁵ Like the earlier *mezhrayonts* leaflet, this Bolshevik leaflet was extraordinary: it anticipated the policy that Lenin would adopt on his return to Russia in April and that would ultimately carry the Bolshevik Party to power nine months later.

On 27 February, however, the insurgent Petrograd workers and soldiers largely ignored this appeal in favor of the Mensheviks' soviet. As Hasegawa tells us, it 'could not divert the massive procession of insurgents to the Tauride Palace.'⁶ The Mensheviks understood only too clearly that the Left was trying to create a workers' and peasants' government—and they made every effort to outpace all their revolutionary rivals and ensure that the Soviet's leadership, committed to moderate policies, would provide room for Milyukov's Provisional Government. Even the choice of the Tauride Palace—the seat of the Duma—as the new Soviet's meeting place was a political act. It suggested that *the new government should be bourgeois in character and, in some manner, include the Duma*. Although the Menshevik appeal claimed to be issued by 'representatives of the workers, soldiers, and other people of Petrograd', none of its authors appears to have participated in the strike movement and insurrection, let alone to 'represent' anyone but themselves.

After the planning meeting ended, some of the Soviet's organizers made haste to canvass the city's factories and call upon whomever they could find there instantly to elect 'deputies' for a meeting of the Soviet that was to be held only a few hours later. At nine p.m. the first plenary session of the new Soviet finally got under way at the Tauride. The palace itself was literally divided topographically into a 'right wing', where the Provisional Government met, and a 'left wing', occupied by the aborning Soviet, thus creating what would soon be called a 'dual power'. The participants in the Soviet, by most accounts, numbered no more than 50 voting 'deputies' and 200 observers. Apart from Shliapnikov and a handful of his party comrades, only a few Bolsheviks were present at this fateful opening session. The workers were apparently unclear about the ultimate goals of the various socialist parties and turned to their better-known deputies. Due to the quasi-legal status that the Mensheviks enjoyed as a result of their participation in the Duma and the Workers' Group, they were widely known to the mass of workers in the capital and easily rose to leadership of the Soviet.

At the first meeting in the Tauride, the Mensheviks and their moderate socialist supporters consolidated their control over the new Petrograd Soviet

by electing Chkheidze as chairman and Skobelev and Kerensky as vice-chairmen. The plenary also created an Executive Committee, which included six Mensheviks (Chkheidze, Skobelev, Gvozdev, Grinevich, Sokolovsky and Pankov), two moderate Socialist Revolutionaries (Kerensky and Alexandrovich), two Bolsheviks (Shliapnikov and Zalutsky), and five non-party intellectuals (Sukhanov, Steklov, Sokolov, Krasikov and Kapelinsky), most of whom initially tilted politically toward the Mensheviks' policy.

SOVIET POWER

The Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet was quickly endowed by the Revolution with power unequaled by any other authority in Russia. Workers were at its beck and call in any action it chose to take, and Russia's peasants soon came to follow its lead, especially if it promised a repartition of the land. Although its Menshevik leaders were avowedly reluctant to turn the Soviet into a state—Menshevik dogma explicitly assigned that task to the alleged 'revolutionary bourgeoisie'—material circumstances and popular allegiances soon forced the Soviet to function as a state power.

The Executive Committee began to function as a state when it established commissions to handle affairs that properly belonged to a bourgeois government. During the afternoon of 27 February, before the Soviet had even met, the Provisional Executive Committee had already formed a Food Supply Commission to handle the distribution of food in the capital, and a Military Commission to restore order in the army. A Socialist Revolutionary, one Colonel Sergey Mstislavsky, was instrumental in forming the Military Commission, which decided to meet, not in the left wing of the Tauride Palace, but in the right—in fact, in the offices of the Duma's vice-chairman, the Kadet Nikolai Nekrasov. This change of venue all but placed control over the military in the Duma Committee's hands. That night the first plenary of the Soviet angrily overruled Mstislavsky's literal 'move to the right' and brought the Military Commission back to its place in the palace's left wing, placing it under its own jurisdiction.

Moreover, while meeting in its first session, the Soviet enacted an old demand of the Left. It decided to replace the capital's hated police forces with a militia, to be composed of a hundred out of every thousand factory workers in the capital. These contingents were to be led by commissars from the Soviet's district committees, which were being established in all of Petrograd's boroughs. Two days later, militia units composed of factory workers were formed throughout the capital, to the chagrin of the Provisional Government.

Among the members on the Executive Committee, the executors of the Soviet's power, notably the right-wing members, visibly outnumbered the leftists. At the 27 February session of the committee Shliapnikov, dissatisfied with the low representation accorded the Bolsheviks, proposed that every socialist party in the city assign two deputies to the Soviet's Executive. His motion was approved, and when the Executive Committee met the next morning, its membership had grown to include two Socialist Revolutionaries (Zenzinov and Sviatitsky), two additional Bolsheviks (Molotov and Shutko), and a *mezhrayonts* (Iurenev).

But it also included additional right-wing socialists: two Trudoviks (Bramson and Chaikovksy), two members of the right-wing Popular Socialist Party (Peshekhonov and Chernolusky); two Jewish Bundists (Ehrlich and Rafes), and two additional Mensheviks (Bogdanov and Batursky). Most of these added members were hostile to the Bolsheviks and the *mezhrayontsy*. The net effect of Shliapnikov's motion was thus inadvertently to tilt the Executive Committee even further to the right than before, reinforcing the Menshevik policy of collaboration with the liberal bourgeoisie.

Tradition and precedent also played a role in the formation of social loyalties. Given the insurrectionary mood of the masses, the Soviet plenaries could not allow the Executive Committee to collaborate too closely with capitalists. Thus when the time came for the Petrograd Soviet to define its power in relation to that of the Provisional Government, the members of the Executive Committee suffered from political schizophrenia. On 1 March, following Marxist precept, it duly voted (13 to 8) not to join the Provisional Government, and on 2 March the Soviet adopted the semi-Bolshevik position of functioning as a "controlling organ of revolutionary democracy" vis-à-vis the [official] government.⁷ Hence it agreed only to 'conditionally support' the government—a formula that was to harness the Soviet to the government in all the months that followed.

Meanwhile, on 28 February the Provisional Government had issued an order, under the Kadet minister Rodzianko's signature, commanding the insurrectionary troops to return to their barracks and place themselves at the disposition of their former officers. It should be understood that the soldiers had rebelled not only against the tsarist regime but against the old military hierarchy and its disciplinary authority as embodied by the officers. On the day Rodzianko's order was issued, the insurrection was by no means over; armed conflicts were still continuing in the capital. The revolutionary soldiers had every reason to believe that if they followed the order and returned to their barracks, their former officers would disarm them and subject them to retaliation.

That Rodzianko had even dared to issue such an order produced shock and

dismay among the workers and soldiers. The Soviet plenary session furiously condemned the order and even demanded Rodzianko's arrest. For their part the insurgent soldiers took matters into their own hands by electing their own commanders. The Moscow Regiment even went so far as to arrest suspect officers and bring them to the Tauride Palace for confinement. Rodzianko's order thus had the ultimate effect of inducing any reluctant soldiers to elect delegates to the Soviet, following the workers on the day before, and to air their grievances there, making the Soviet into the sole armed popular power in the capital.

On 1 March, while the Executive Committee was completing the day's business, soldiers poured *en masse* into its meeting room and demanded that it prevent the Duma Committee from placing them under the command of their old officers. In Hasegawa's colorful description,

suddenly the doors of the assembly hall [of the Soviet] flung open and a large group of soldiers burst into the hall. Overwhelmed by the number of soldiers, who for the first time appeared in the Soviet session *en masse*, and panic-stricken by their anger, [the Menshevik] Skobelev immediately announced that the session was open. The soldiers turned this general session to an exclusive meeting of soldiers, not allowing other delegates to speak.⁸

The Petrograd Soviet of Workers' Deputies, now filled with angry gray-coated delegates, quickly renamed itself the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, uneasily giving the volatile soldiers a direct voice in its operations and decisions.

A new plenum was thus established consisting exclusively of soldiers. This plenum, thenceforth called the Soldiers' Section, proceeded to pass resolutions of its own that required that the Soviet approve of all military orders before the soldiers would execute them. It further resolved that no weapons could be turned over to the officers; rather, arms were to be placed in the custody of battalion committees elected by the ranks. After much debate about whether officers should be elected, the Soldiers' Section agreed to limit the authority of the officers exclusively to men on duty, and it required officers to give their orders to ordinary soldiers respectfully and politely (as they had rarely done in the past). Lastly, the plenum demanded that the garrison soviets be composed of deputies from all units of the army.

When these resolutions were transmitted to the Provisional Government, Rodzianko and Guchkov categorically rejected them. After the delegates from the Soldiers' Section made several vain attempts to gain the adoption of their resolutions, they finally left, angrily asserting, 'So much the better, we will

write them ourselves.' And so they did. Ten soldiers—two Bolsheviks, two Menshevik-Internationalists, one moderate Menshevik, a Socialist Revolutionary, a Kadet and a handful of unaffiliated soldiers—were elected to the Executive Committee of the Soviet as soldiers' representatives. Together with the Menshevik Sokolov they betook themselves to a room adjacent to the meeting place of the Executive Committee and wrote the remarkable Order Number 1, which essentially shifted full command of the army over to the Soviet.

The soldiers who wrote this vitally important order were no political naïfs—most were likely members of revolutionary parties, and a few may even have been junior officers. Sukhanov, who witnessed the writing of the order, describes the scene with earthy authenticity:

Around 10 o'clock, going back behind the curtain of Room 13, where the [Executive Committee] had been in session shortly before, I found the following scene: N.D. Sokolov was sitting at a table writing. He was surrounded on all sides by soldiers, standing, sitting, and leaning on the table, half-dictating and half-suggesting to Sokolov what he should write. . . . It appeared that this was a committee elected by the Soviet to compose an 'Order' to the soldiers. There was no agenda and no discussion of any kind, everyone spoke, and all were completely absorbed in the work, formulating their collective opinion without any voting. I stood and listened, extraordinarily interested. When the work was finished they put a heading on the sheet: 'Order No. 1.'*

Trotsky appropriately called the Order Number 1 'a charter of the freedom of the revolutionary army.'⁹ Addressed to 'all the soldiers of the Guard, army, artillery and fleet for immediate and precise execution, and to the workers of

* N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917: A Personal Record*, ed. and trans. by Joel Carmichael (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 113. Richard Pipes, a historian who was also a member of Ronald Reagan's National Security Council, asserts: 'One of the myths of the Russian Revolution is that Order No. 1 was dictated by a crowd of grubby soldiers. Sukhanov has left a vivid picture of the Social-Democratic lawyer N.D. Sokolov seated at a table in Taurida and writing down the demands of the troops. There even exists a photograph which seems to lend visual credibility to this version of the order's origins.' But, says Pipes, the Order 'was initially formulated, not by rank-and-file soldiers, but by civilians and garrison delegates picked by the Ispolkom, some of them officers and most of them affiliated with the socialist parties.' Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 304. Is this interpretation tenable? Sukhanov was certainly in a better position to describe the event than Pipes, and there is nothing whatever in his report that indicates the presence of a 'crowd', let alone 'grubby soldiers'.

Petrograd for information', it abolished all honorific titles and forms of address for officers; officers were to desist from addressing soldiers in the familiar second-person singular, the form by which masters had addressed serfs. Off-duty soldiers and sailors were no longer obliged to salute their officers, act deferentially toward them, or provide them with services as they had in the past. 'Arms of all kinds,' which it specified in detail, were to be placed 'at the disposition and under the control of the company and battalion committees' and were not 'in any case to be given out to officers, even upon their demand.'

Moreover, the order opened a wide breach between the Soviet and the Provisional Government. It bestowed upon the Soviet's Executive Committee full command of the Petrograd garrison—a large army in its own right—and control over most of the military forces at the front. Resolutions passed by the Soldiers' Section became commanding directives of the Petrograd Soviet, and orders issued by the Provisional Government could be fulfilled 'only in those cases which do not contradict the orders and decisions of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.' The order called upon all military units to 'choose committees' and elect 'one representative to a company [generally, 250 men], who should appear with written credentials in [the Tauride Palace] at ten o'clock in the morning of March 2.'¹⁰ The soldiers seized upon it as their declaration of independence from the tsarist military system and established front-line committees at all military levels, from company to division.

The Menshevik-dominated Executive Committee was by no means eager to accept the tremendous amount of power that the order conferred upon it—in fact, it issued an order appealing to the troops to obey their superiors. But the Petrograd typesetters refused to publish the committee's document. Two days later the Executive Committee tried again, issuing Order Number 2, a more prudent ordinance that attempted to repeal the more radical aspects of its predecessor. It established a 'commission', composed principally of Executive Committee Mensheviks, that was designed to curb the authority of all soldiers' committees. The committee's subsequent Order Number 3 limited the jurisdiction of the first two orders solely to the Petrograd garrison. But many army formations simply ignored the order and established frontline committees that were composed of three soldiers and one officer to interpret them.

EARLY SOVIET POLITICS

In the months that followed the February uprising, soviets were established in the *uezdy* and the provinces of the old empire, while the large cities and towns

of the realm formed municipal soviets. Often even a village *skhod* would be renamed a 'soviet', although many of them remained direct democracies, in contrast to the representative system used by the urban soviets. By the end of 1917 an estimated 900 soviets existed in Russia. The Petrograd Soviet, in turn, formed the apex of an elaborate structure of soviets that existed at all levels of political life.

While the provincial soviets tried to emulate the Petrograd Soviet, they varied enormously in structure, in number of members, and in their occupational background. The Moscow Soviet of Workers' Deputies, for example, was composed of 700 deputies, 540 of whom were workers, while the remainder were professionals and salaried employees. The soviet was divided into two plenaries—Workers' and Soldiers' Sections—that met separately and had separate executive committees (whose combined membership totaled 75); they were co-ordinated in joint meetings.

Although the Petrograd proletariat greatly outnumbered the garrison, the soldier-deputies to the Soviet outnumbered the worker-deputies by three to one. In March a Petrograd Soviet plenary comprised only 800 workers and 2000 soldiers. The same disproportion was replicated in most of the urban centers that had garrisons. Military units of various sizes—companies, battalions, and regiments—flooded soviet plenaries with deputies, skewing decisions in favor of the garrison rather than reflecting the views of the much larger proletariat. The numerical superiority of soldier-deputies made the soviets more conservative than they should have been, reflecting the views of the peasants-in-uniform, who generally felt that Russia should continue to fight the Central Powers until a separate peace could be achieved 'without annexations and indemnities.'

Irakly Tseretelli's return from Siberia in March pushed the moderate Menshevik faction, initially led by Chkheidze, markedly to the right. Before the Revolution, Tseretelli had been a paragon of Marxian orthodoxy. But the success of the Revolution had changed his views profoundly: not only did he believe strongly that the liberal parties had vigorously to lead a 'bourgeois democratic' revolution, but his influence on the party did much to change the Mensheviks from defenders of the workers into supporters of the liberal bourgeoisie, or the 'democracy', as the Provisional Government and its supporters came to be called.

The rightward tilt of the Petrograd Soviet was thus supported both by its Menshevik-dominated Executive Committee and by its politically unsophisticated soldier-delegate majorities in its plenaries. Accordingly, the Soviet passed measures that played directly into the Provisional Government's hands. The very unruliness of many soviet plenaries, which often resembled rallies more than popular legislatures, facilitated this outcome. In many cases, votes were

held by acclamation rather than by balloting. The plenaries' very looseness and informality made it easy for organized cliques to manipulate them, militating against democracy and concentrating power in committees and commissions. Political celebrities tended to overshadow the intellectually more responsible figures from the old underground. An unknown number of 'deputies' were self-appointed rather than elected. The absence of regulations to guarantee fairness in the plenaries' procedures and identify legitimate delegates—far from fostering revolutionary democracy, as anarchists might have supposed—served the interests of the Right. These problems worsened as the Soviet's plenaries grew in size. Plenaries were held in the largest Petrograd theaters, but even these venues, especially during joint plenaries of the Soldiers' and Workers' Sections, were filled so completely that the deputies—overheated, weary, and choking on tobacco smoke—were obliged to stand wearily for many hours during the disorderly proceedings.

As the weeks passed, however, and as experienced socialist leaders returned from abroad or from Siberia, the soviets became more deliberative bodies. Although some voices still favored large plenaries as more democratic, legitimate delegates replaced free-wheeling interlopers who spoke for no one but themselves, and the proceedings were conducted in a more orderly fashion.

The 18–19 March plenary meetings of the Petrograd Soviet decided that the Soviet's two sections had to be trimmed down to 250–300 delegates each, forming a full Soviet of 600. In the middle of April, the credentials committee began excluding illegitimate would-be delegates. These measures made the Soviet's plenums more workable bodies.

But other changes tended to reduce the plenaries' democracy. During late February and early March plenums had been held daily, but in March only five were held, and only six in April. As plenaries met less frequently, more of the plenary's business was left to the Executive Committee. As Oskar Anweiler observes, 'most practical activity ... remained in the hands of the Executive Committee,' which 'maintained its preeminence dating from the first days of the revolution.'¹¹ Smaller, less frequent plenums were easier for the Executive Committee to manipulate, which it did with considerable dexterity. 'The soviet Executive,' Anweiler continues, 'became increasingly independent, even though it remained subject to certain controls by the deputies, who had the right to discharge it.'¹²

Irakly Tseretelli also did much to centralize the Petrograd Soviet and diminish the power of its plenaries. On 14 March he induced his fellow Mensheviks to set up a small select bureau (sometimes called a presidium) within the Executive Committee, which was charged with 'preparing all the business' for the committee's sessions and with 'solving current questions'—a vague formulation that could be interpreted quite broadly.¹³ The bureau met

secretly and more frequently than even the Executive Committee, which had initially met daily but now held its meetings only three times a week.

The bureau was composed of eleven Mensheviks, six Socialist Revolutionaries, three Trudoviks, and four unaligned Social Democrats. A scant few seats were assigned to the Bolsheviks, but far fewer than they would have received had the bureau reflected their real strength among the workers. Outraged, the Bolsheviks accused Tseretelli and his colleagues of creating the bureau specifically for the purpose of excluding them, and they refused to legitimize its authority by occupying their assigned seats. The Bolsheviks began to attack the bureau unremittingly. They were joined by Martov's newly formed radical group, the Menshevik-Internationalists; one of its members, Sukhanov, called the bureau a 'star chamber.' A month after it was formed, Tseretelli and his supporters were obliged to compromise: members of the Executive Committee were permitted to attend the bureau's meetings—but only as non-voting observers. That is, they could sit in on bureau meetings, but they were not permitted publicly to disclose its proceedings or even the location of the meeting place. To add injury to insult, the bureau reserved the right to reject as a member anyone who refused to support the Executive Committee's Menshevik 'defensist' line. This rule automatically excluded everyone—Bolsheviks, *mezhrayontsy*, and Menshevik-Internationalists—who differed furiously with Tseretelli and his followers on support for the war. Political homogeneity now became the order of the day.

Thus by the end of March a hierarchy had emerged in the Petrograd Soviet that increasingly limited its democratic practices. The tightly controlled, essentially secretive bureau, which was dominated by Tseretelli and, to a lesser degree, Chkheidze, presided over the Executive Committee and by extension over the Soviet's ever-rarer plenums, greatly diminishing the democracy they professed to defend. Nor was the Petrograd Soviet by any means alone in pursuing this authoritarian direction. In Saratov, too, the plenum was gradually subordinated to its executive, and the executive to its bureau. Initially, the plenum of the Saratov Soviet had met every second day, preceded by a meeting of the executive the evening before. By the end of July, however, the plenum met only every two weeks (although its workers' section met weekly), and the executive met only twice a week. But the bureau met daily, which suggests, as John Keep observes, 'that the executive committee itself lost influence to its bureau, which was nominally subordinate to it.'¹⁴ As the months passed, executive committees in other locales gradually appropriated powers from plenums, and bureaus steadily usurped the powers of executive committees, with the result that Russian workers and soldiers saw their control over the Revolution's course begin to slip from their fingers.

The multi-tiered structure of soviets was also becoming less democratic and

more centralized, particularly as elections to the various levels of local and provincial soviets came to be conducted indirectly. Members of a 'higher'-level soviet were chosen not by all the workers that had particular jurisdiction in a popular election, but by the various soviets on the level 'below' them in the soviet hierarchy. District soviets, for example, elected the members of city soviets, who in turn elected the members of provincial soviets. This decidedly hierarchical system of representation increasingly removed the soviets from direct popular control.

Throughout Russia, as winter and spring passed into summer, the layers of soviets that had blossomed in March developed sizable bureaucracies. Commissions or departments, established for the various tasks that confronted the country, steadily took on a life of their own, with growing staffs, offices, and emoluments. The proliferation of departments in the Petrograd Soviet is typical. On 3 March the Petrograd Soviet created eleven departments (initially commissions), each of which was equipped with a staff of experts, administrators, and office workers. These departments dealt with military affairs, supply, labor, the formulation of legislative proposals, international affairs, propaganda, finance and the co-ordination of the city soviet with its district soviets, among other things. To its credit, the Petrograd Soviet dared to do what had daunted the Paris Commune: it placed a guard over the state bank, the mint, and the government printing office, thereby taking the financial life of Russia into its own hands.

But a gap was opening and widening between the leaders who sat on the executive committees and bureaus and the masses who had placed them in power. The steady growth of the Bolsheviks' popularity in the late spring and early summer of 1917 is normally attributed to the failure of the Provisional Government's liberals and the Soviet Mensheviks to satisfy the desires of the people for peace, food and land. But the widening gulf between the Soviet leaders and the people, which occurred fairly early in the Revolution, was doubtless a major factor as well. As the Petrograd Soviet's bureaucracy grew, so too did its need for space. The Petrograd Soviet soon took over the entire Tauride Palace, while the Provisional Government moved its quarters to the former tsar's Winter Palace, where ministerial eyes could linger on the large square where troops had shot so many workers on Bloody Sunday in 1905. Oskar Anweiler observes that after two months the Petrograd Soviet changed 'from a provisional revolutionary organ into a well-organized administrative machine. ... However, as the soviet worked more efficiently, it lost proportionately its direct contact with the masses.'¹⁵

After the Bolsheviks took over the soviet government in October, the Mensheviks would regret establishing these centralizing and authoritarian precedents, which the Bolsheviks enlarged upon. Still, the Mensheviks and SRs

in the Petrograd Soviets were far less authoritarian than the Bolsheviks would become. Under their control the Petrograd Soviet never became a statist ogre, and the Executive Committee and the various committees were still subject to many democratic controls from below. The Mensheviks still adhered to their long-time position that Russia needed to undergo a liberal 'bourgeois democratic' stage, a precept that made them very responsive to changes in popular mood. No less important, it led them to develop a richly articulated society that took the form of factory committees, militia contingents, trade unions, local soviets, and a finely spun network of popular societies that annulled the effects of the many governmental institutions that had existed under the old regime.

NOTES

1. N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917: A Personal Record*, ed. and trans. Joel Carmichael (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 145.
2. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd, 1917* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1981), p. 330.
3. *Izvestia*, Feb. 28, 1917; quoted in *ibid.*, p. 332.
4. V.I. Lenin, 'A Few Theses' (Oct. 1915), in *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1942), p. 5:155.
5. Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, p. 334.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers', Peasants', and Soldiers' Councils, 1905-1921*, trans. Ruth Hein (New York: Pantheon, 1974), p. 105.
8. Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, p. 394.
9. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1932), p. 1:276.
10. 'Order Number One', rpt. in William Henry Chamberlain, *The Russian Revolution, 1917-1921* (1935; New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1965), p. 1:429-30; emphasis added.
11. Anweiler, *Soviets*, p. 107.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
13. *Izvestia*, Mar. 16, 1917.
14. Keep, *Russian Revolution*, p. 126.
15. Anweiler, *Soviets*, p. 108.

CHAPTER 45 Popular Committees and District Soviets

THE FACTORY COMMITTEES

Following the overthrow of the monarchy, a vast array of popular organizations—factory, neighborhood, military, and village committees, councils, unions, and cooperatives—appeared, in which workers, soldiers, sailors and peasants created a dazzling new social and economic reality that remade the institutional structure of Russian society. Russia's *komitetchina*, as this growth was called, which convened politically in local, regional, and all-Russian congresses and conferences, was comparable in degree of self-management only to that of the French revolutionary sections of 1793.

Factory committees in particular began to exercise great economic control over the industrial cities, rapidly politicizing and radicalizing the proletariat. To be sure, the factory committees long antedated the February Revolution; as we have seen, Russian workers had a long tradition of working together in corporate bodies. The peasants who came to the cities looking for jobs brought with them deeply ingrained values of collective decision-making that had served them so well in the countryside. A strong spirit of co-operation and mutual aid, born in the Russian *obshchina*, was carried over into the cities by rural craftsmen and 'peasants in overalls'. After the February Revolution, this cooperative tradition found its formal expression in factory committees, which increasingly gained control over the shop environment after February and commonly determined the length of the workday, the wage scale, and even industrial output. As John Keep observes, the revolutionary factory committees emerged directly out of the February strikes: 'It was natural that those [workers] who organized the informal strike committees which emerged in Petrograd during the February days should seek to perpetuate their existence

once the men had returned to work.¹ One of the first formally organized factory committees was established on 1 March at the Petrograd Cable Works, which was engaged in munitions production. The workers demanded that they be permitted to create a militia and a committee to oversee the operations of the factory shop—a measure to which management was obliged to agree.

Thereafter factory committees proliferated rapidly throughout Petrograd and other industrial cities. On 10 March, Petrograd employers concluded a joint agreement to permit workers to establish such committees; less than two weeks later, on 23 April, the Petrograd Soviet promulgated a law making the factory committees into permanent institutions. On 6 May the Provisional Government took cognizance of the committees, passing a statute allowing for workers' participation in industrial management.

Factory committees normally consisted of the most militant workers in an enterprise. Known as the *worker-intelligenty*, they were the most politically informed workers in a shop—the men with 'ideas', so to speak—who either belonged to or were associated with *kruzhky*, or study circles, and revolutionary parties. They were the workers whom their peers chose to speak for their interests on the shop floor and with the fighters who had come to the foreground during strikes and spoken for strike committees. And they were the informal leaders who propelled strikes into virtual insurrections. The more zealous factory committees met frequently, often under the eyes of the entire factory workforce, so that they sometimes resembled workers' assemblies more than committees. The 1866 Electric Power Company workers' committee, established on 2 March 1917, convened 45 times during March and April—indeed, almost daily. Initially the committees concerned themselves with bread-and-butter issues, such as the eight-hour day; but they soon demanded and even exercised much broader rights, vetoing the appointment of managers and dismissing those whom they found objectionable. Foremen and even engineers and technicians against whom workers had long-standing grievances were dismissed by the score and in some cases were handed over to the army to be dispatched to the front.

Over time the committees involved themselves in ever more detailed aspects of the workers' everyday lives. They saw to the workers' food supply, opening canteens and establishing cooperatives as hunger set in. They maintained discipline among unruly workers and absentees. In time they took responsibility for the formation and maintenance of workers' militias, educational and cultural affairs, and campaigns against gambling and drunkenness. They organized classes to improve literacy, staged cultural events such as plays, promoted lectures, and fostered political discussion. Virtually no aspect of life escaped the attention of the committees. In one instance a committee took it upon itself to decide whether to buy scented soap for the workers. Such

concerns, trifling as they seem, made the committee meetings the most intimate locus of working-class life. As S.A. Smith tells us:

Precisely because of this concern with the detail of everyday life at the factory ... the committees were considered by the workers to be 'their' institutions—far closer to them than the [trade] unions or the soviets, and consequently more popular. Workers did not hesitate to turn to the committees for help and advice. The wife of a worker at the Sestroretsk arms works turned to the works committee when her husband threw her out, although the committee was unable to do much.²

The committees were developing political goals that were soon to be remarkably radical. On 13 March representatives of the factory committees in twelve enterprises under the management of the state's Main Artillery Administration expressly raised the call for workers' control over industrial production. During the course of several months, the representatives' conference drew up a programmatic 'instruction' that advanced many syndicalistic ideas, reflecting the growing power of the factory committees: 'All administrative personnel, such as works directors, departmental and workshop heads,' it read, 'all technical officials ... and other managerial staff are to assume their duties with the approval of the general factory committee.'³ The conference assigned itself the role of controlling 'the activity of the works management in an administrative-economic and technical sense'; as Keep explains, 'its representatives were to be present in all departments of the enterprise and were to have access to all documents, accounts and other official papers.'⁴ In varying degrees most of the proletariat of Petrograd accepted the conference's 'instruction'. But they interpreted it differently: some thought it meant that workers should participate in the management of industrial enterprises through advisory boards, while others thought it meant that workers should take over industry outright and fully manage it through democratically elected factory committees.

On 24 April the Putilov workers devised their own 'instruction' on establishing shop committees, calling for factories to take, as Smith puts it, 'as much independence and initiative as possible.'

The success of the labour organisations in the factories fully depends on this. By becoming accustomed to self-management ... the workers are preparing for that time when private ownership of factories and works will be abolished, and the means of production, together with the buildings erected by the workers' hands, will pass into the hands of the working class as a whole. Thus, whilst doing the small things, we must constantly bear in

mind the great overriding objective towards which the working people . . . is striving.⁵

As much as this statement resembled what anarcho-syndicalists were preaching in Petrograd at the time, the influence of actual anarcho-syndicalists was negligible. Smith warns, 'This passage, which is *typical* of working-class discourse at the time, cannot be interpreted as reflecting a spirit of shop sectarianism; it rather expresses a commitment to grass-roots democracy and to self-activity which is characteristic of 1917.'⁶

Attempts to achieve workers' control over industry must have varied greatly from region to region, and much of the evidence tends to be anecdotal. Nor is it clear that workers fully understood the difference between placing factories under the jurisdiction of workers' committees and placing them under the jurisdiction of the state. Given that workers received the idea of workers' control with enthusiasm, however, few obstacles could have prevented daring militants from achieving economic democracy in many of the city's industrial facilities. By October, as Paul Avrich writes, 'some form of workers' control existed in the great majority of Russian enterprises.'⁷ But attempts by workers to actually take over factories, as Smith observes, were relatively rare and usually happened in order to preserve the factory's existence.

Although anarcho-syndicalism did increase in popularity after October, most such takeovers were motivated not by a utopian desire to set up producers' communes but by the hope of forcing the government to take financial responsibility for the enterprise by appointing an official, or board, to run it (so-called 'sequestration'). This was true, for instance, of the few cases of workers' management in Moscow (at the Dinamo machine-construction works, the Benno-Rontaller button factory, and the Ganzen wood factory). Only in the Ukraine did the fevered tempo of class conflict, combined with appalling levels of closure, lead to significant numbers of worker takeovers.⁸

In the early months of 1917 committee members were most commonly chosen not because of their specific political affiliations but because of the respect they had earned among the workers. A Bolshevik chairman might head a committee of non-party-affiliated members. The central body at the Putilov works, for example, had a Bolshevik chairman but a majority of unaffiliated members. In other cases, workers chose committee members of a particular political affiliation, not because they were familiar with a party's program, but because its name seemed to accord with their own sentiments. Workers in the Obukhov arms plant, for example, probably adopted the name Socialist

Revolutionaries 'simply because the name of this party seemed to harmonize with their own ideals,' says Keep.⁹ Factories whose workers were ideologically close to the extreme Bolsheviks often nonetheless elected committees that contained majorities of Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries—even while objecting to those parties' foot-dragging positions.

It was not until the summer of 1917 that workers begin to choose factory committee members based on political affiliation. By that time Bolshevik propaganda—reinforced by the undemocratic behavior of the Menshevik- and SR-controlled Executive Committee—had made the political distinctions between the socialist parties fairly clear, with the result that party allegiance became an issue of real importance in factory committee elections. Factory committees were in fact the first bodies in Petrograd consciously to elect Bolshevik majorities; in April the 1886 Electric Power Company established a Bolshevik-controlled committee by a vote of 673 out of 1230.

Inevitably, the many factory committees in Petrograd sought to work together institutionally, and in the spring of 1917 the Putilov workers made an appeal for a citywide conference. By this time the Bolsheviks probably exercised the strongest influence within Petrograd's factory committees; indeed, according to Frederick I. Kaplan, it was they 'who seem to have been the chief initiators of the First Conference of the Factory Committees of Petrograd and its Environs.'¹⁰ This conference was held from 30 May to 3 June at the Tauride Palace, the citadel of Menshevik-SR soviet power. Nearly 570 delegates appeared, of whom about half came from metallurgical factories. Representation was based on one delegate from factory committees in enterprises with 1000 workers or fewer; two from factory committees in enterprises with 1000 to 10,000; and three from enterprises with more than 10,000. Some speakers extolled the value of workers' control as a preparation for socialist production and underscored the crucial role of the factory committees in fighting the bourgeoisie. The Mensheviks presented a dissenting view, spurning workers' control as chaotic and particularistic: the Menshevik Skobelev declared that 'the regulation and control of industry is not a matter for a particular class' and invited the delegates to co-operate with management. By a vote of 230 to 128, however, the delegates rejected the Mensheviks' position. On the second day of the conference, Lenin (who by now had returned to Russia) excoriated the Mensheviks for trying to obstruct workers' control. The statement apparently surprised everyone: as a result, remarks Keep, the 'anarchists and syndicalists present could be forgiven for thinking that Lenin had been converted to their views.'¹¹ The conference closed by establishing a formal 25-man Central Committee of Factory Committees of Petrograd (CCFCP), chaired by a Bolshevik.

During the spring and summer, factory committees spread irresistibly to the

remaining Russian industrial cities. Conferences like the one in Petrograd were held in Kharkov at the end of May, in Moscow at the end of June, and in other provincial industrial cities in the weeks that followed. The Kharkov conference, more than any other, was militantly syndicalist, eschewing the influence of the moderate trade unions and calling for a national organization of factory committees.

Despite the factory committees' support for the Bolsheviks, however, the workers continued to distrust all intellectuals or 'professional revolutionaries' who professed to speak for them, as they had since the 1890s. They never felt that the Bolshevik Party, in particular, was their own organization, and they were often uncomfortable with, even hostile to, much of its intellectual leadership. The factory committees, as a result, began to compete with the Bolsheviks for the allegiance of the working class. If the soviets were a dual power in relation to Kerensky's republican state, the factory committees were potentially a dual power in relationship to the soviets as well as the Bolshevik Party, which had taken over many of the soviets. Indeed, over the course of 1917 a 'triple power' began to appear in Russia: the Provisional Government, the soviets, and the factory committees.

THE MILITIAS

The February Revolution led to the abolition of all tsarist police agencies. At the first general session of the Petrograd Soviet on 27 February, a Menshevik deputy, M.A. Braunstein, proposed that the Soviet issue a directive to the factories in the capital, instructing them to form militia units consisting of ten men out of every hundred, and appoint a commissar for each district to oversee the militia's activities. Braunstein's motion was adopted by a voice vote, but the workers needed no directive from the Soviet to form their own militia units. During the February street fighting they had already begun to do so, with considerable gusto. In fact, the factory committee of the Putilov works had called for the formation of armed workers' detachments as early as 25 February. As Hasegawa observes, the aims of these militias were revolutionary:

On February 27 at least three groups of insurgent workers attempted to create a militia; and in two cases of these three the creation of a militia directly resulted from the workers' struggle against the police. This militant desire to destroy the old order and establish their own autonomous power underscored the principal purpose of the workers' militia thereafter—a

purpose far more important in their minds than the mere restoration of order and the struggle against lawlessness and anarchy.¹²

In calling for a workers' militia, the Soviet was simply acknowledging an accomplished fact and adding legitimacy and momentum to the ongoing process of forming armed working-class detachments. By 1 and 2 March all large factories were enthusiastically forming or enlarging their militias. Eduard Dune, who had been a member of a Moscow workers' militia, later described militia training in that city:

The volunteers numbered 150 and were all drawn from among the young workers, with the exception of some three dozen older men. Twice a week we lined up and were taught military drill, tactics, camouflage, and the rifle manual. We had no weapons, so we learned the rifle manual using wooden staves. We also marched with these. Ensign Lygzdyn', son of a worker at the factory, was elected commander of the militia.¹³

In contrast to the Moscow workers, the Petrograd workers had access to weapons in great variety and number. The seizure of the Arsenal placed at least 60,000 rifles, 30,000 pistols, and an enormous number of cartridges in their hands, in addition to the weapons and ammunition they had already seized from regimental stores. Although the Provisional Government issued appeals for the return of these weapons, very few workers did so. Much of the Petrograd proletariat was thus well armed, particularly in the Vyborg District, where workers' detachments patrolled the streets and occupied strategic positions in the locality.

To be sure, the workers were not alone in forming militia units within Petrograd's city limits: on 28 February the City Duma—the equivalent of the pre-revolutionary city council—established a city militia under its own jurisdiction. Regarded by the Provisional Government as a regular police force, the city militia's function was organized to preserve public order, protect property, disarm juveniles and 'hooligans', and handle logistical problems such as traffic control. In effect, this force simply replaced the old tsarist police force. As of early March, it numbered some 7000 armed men, most of whom were students, civil servants, civic-minded middle-class people, and regular police who were free of compromising political connections with the autocracy.

In many industrial areas, however, the workers' militia units supplanted the city militia. Workers' units patrolled the streets not only in the Vyborg but in the industrial Vasilievsky Island District, where a general meeting of workers at the Cable Works explicitly demanded that the Petrograd Soviet give full

authority to the workers' militia in preference to the city militia. As Hasegawa notes, 'In the industrial sections of the city, the workers' [militia] commissariats constituted the sole, highest power, establishing the workers' self-government and fulfilling the most direct day-to-day administrative function, thus filling the power vacuum created by the elimination of the tsarist police.'¹⁴ The Petrograd city militia acquired pre-eminence over the workers' militia only in the less industrialized parts of the city, like the Moscow and Kolmna Districts. By mid-March the city militia controlled about 65 militia centers, compared to the twenty controlled by the workers' militia.

But the armed workers outnumbered the city's force by 11,000 to 8000. In some parts of Petrograd, there was a great deal of overlapping between the two militias, which sometimes led to a mutually tolerant integration of functions: the city militia would patrol one street, while contingents of workers' militia patrolled an adjacent one. In other areas, however, the coexistence of two militia forces led to considerable friction. In the Petrograd District, for example, the relations between the two forces were so tense that, in order to avoid outright conflict, they were obliged to work out a guarded compromise.

In Moscow, as Dune tells us, the workers' militia was highly selective in choosing its members: 'The candidacy of each prospective member was discussed at a session of the factory committee, and applicants were often turned down on the grounds that they were regularly drunk or engaged in hooliganism or behaved coarsely with women.'¹⁵ Petrograd's militia was, if anything, even more selective: applicants were carefully screened, then members were chosen by lot and grouped in squads of ten men each, which in turn were combined into companies of one hundred men each. Ten companies, or a thousand men, made up a battalion.* The rank-and-file elected all their commanders. The characteristic insignia, both for ordinary militiamen and for officers, was a red armband, and the normal form of address was 'comrade', with no honorifics.

Initially it was the factory committees that controlled the workers' militias and provided militiamen with identification permits. Once established, the units commonly trained in their respective factory yards during paid working hours. Ostensibly they were responsible for protecting the factory's property, but a militiaman often spent his time guarding party and soviet headquarters and strategic governmental centers as well as patrolling neighborhoods.

* It is unclear whether this decadonal structure of tens and hundreds was inspired by Braunstein's directive. But it was to be duplicated by the militias in the Spanish Civil War, although most Spaniards almost certainly knew nothing about the organization of the most militias in the Russian Revolution.

Criminal investigations and the defense of property were usually left to the city militia, whose recruits were drawn chiefly from the middle and upper classes.

Politically, the workers' militias were intensely radical from their inception, although at first, like the factory committees, they drew only the vaguest distinctions among the various socialist parties, and tended to distrust all institutions—including the Petrograd Soviet—with the result that workers' militia units often operated primarily under conditions and rules set by their own factory community. As Rex Wade observes in his study of the militias:

The workers' militias and the Petrograd Soviet . . . already looked upon their organizations as much more political and distinctly class-oriented (even if this sentiment was not yet clearly articulated), and at least by implication insisted that the City Militia also was in some way partisan. The workers especially mistrusted the basic concept of a neutral police force. Their experience with the tsarist police led them to look upon the police as agents of the political authorities and backers of the factory management.¹⁶

In the eyes of the Petrograd proletariat, the militias were not only the means to achieving their long-sought material goals; they were also sources of dignity and class empowerment.

For the workers and their factory committees . . . the presence of factory-based armed units gave emphasis to their demands. Although overt use of arms to settle work issues was very rare in the spring, the threat was already there. Indeed, the whole coercive relationship between workers and management was reversed. Now the workers had arms and some organizational basis for their use, whereas management had lost its factory guards and the ultimate threat of government police and troops. The factory guards now were the workers themselves, and the City Militia was too weak to assist employers even if it wanted to.¹⁷

The militias and later class-based military units thus imparted to workers a sense of identity and strength that led them to feel that they were now masters of their own fate.

The Provisional Government, however, viewed the workers' militias with extreme disfavor and determined to disarm them, when doing so became possible. The Petrograd Soviet's Executive Committee, which was also very eager to subordinate the workers to the bourgeoisie, agreed. As Hasegawa explains:

Its actions were motivated not only by a desire to help the 'bourgeois' forces organize a new government but also by its fear that popular pressure might push it to seize power—a course which it was not capable of pursuing and had no intention of following. Indeed, the leaders of the Executive Committee were as scared as the Duma Committee leaders of the uncontrollable energy of the masses, which defied their rational approach and the 'objective' law of history.¹⁸

But for the present both bodies agreed to hold back and attempt to amalgamate the Petrograd workers' militia with the city militia under the official jurisdiction of the city government. The workers' militia vigorously repulsed this effort, disallowing any city militia officials from joining its staff.

Unfortunately for the Mensheviks and their Socialist Revolutionary colleagues on the Executive Committee, however, the workers and probably many of the soldiers did not yearn for a government led by the bourgeoisie—nor, for that matter, by the landowners. Hence the masses generally ignored the attempts by the City Duma, the Provisional Government, and the Soviet's Executive Committee to surrender their hard-won gains and dissolve their factory committees and militia units. Try as it might, the Executive Committee could not persuade the workers to give up their arms and dissolve their fighting institutions.

THE DISTRICT SOVIETS

Politically conscious Russian workers and soldiers nonetheless saw the soviets as their own political organs, the embodiment of their power. Indeed they saw them not simply as a means to achieve their immediate political ends but as the almost quasi-mystical means for creating a new society. This view was basically an extrapolation of the peasant concept of *volya*, the freedom within the village assembly, with all its egalitarian presuppositions. Thus when workers assembled in the open spaces of their factories, mobilized by their shop and factory committees whose deputies consisted of their co-workers, they felt newly empowered and in possession of the means of life upon which their own welfare and that of their society depended.

After the Vyborg District created its soviet on 28 February, district soviets sprang up in every part of Petrograd. Soon the capital was networked by local soviets, which were concerned primarily with neighborhood and factory issues. Situated as they were in the administrative districts or boroughs of Petrograd, the district soviets were very close to, indeed interlocked with, the factory

committees—and hence the workers themselves—than to the Soviet, and they did much to fill the institutional void that was growing up between the Soviet's Executive Committee and the city's working class. They had their own executive committees that reflected with relative sensitivity the changing moods of the masses. In theory the district soviets were obliged to obey the citywide Petrograd Soviet, of which they were extensions or components. Because of the influence that the workers exercised upon them, however, the district soviets were usually more radical than the Petrograd Soviet and tended to act at variance with it—a problem that the Mensheviks and SRs in the Executive Committee could do little to resolve.

Indeed the district soviets became major centers of proletarian mobilization. They often formed direct alliances with factory committees, with which they held joint executive and public meetings. In the Putilov works, observes S.A. Smith, the two bodies 'so dominated the life of the Narva-Peterhof district of Petrograd, that the local soviet of the workers' and soldiers' deputies at first functioned as a committee of the Putilov works.'¹⁹ It was precisely this soviet that, as we have seen, issued the remarkable 'instructions' that cited the factory committee as a school for 'self-management' in a future society.

Eventually representatives of district soviets established an Interdistrict Conference of the Petrograd Soviets to co-ordinate their activities and to use their influence in opposition to the increasingly centralized and bureaucratized citywide Soviet. They thereby created a parallel power of their own within the capital. (In much the same way, during the Great French Revolution, Jean Varlet had attempted to use the revolutionary *Évêché* Committee to circumvent the Hébertist Paris Commune.) This Interdistrict Conference met as the need arose, with increasing frequency in the late summer.

Workers' militia battalions were generally at the disposition of the district soviets, a relationship that the Petrograd Soviet made official after it had already been established in fact. Thus, as early as 28 February, while fighting was still going on in the capital, workers in the gunpowder factories in the Porokhovye District, directly north of the Vyborg, organized the Executive Commission of the Porokhovye District Soviet, which co-ordinated not only the disarming of the police but the formation of one of the first militias in the Revolution. On Vasilievsky Island the workers of the Cable Works created their own militia on 1 March—and demanded that the Petrograd Soviet transfer weapons to their district soviet. When the Petrograd Soviet attempted to dissolve the workers' militia into a city militia in Vasilievsky Island's first subdistrict, the island's district soviet co-operated closely with the workers' militia to counter it.

On 8 March the executive commission of the Vyborg District Soviet vigorously voiced its opposition to amalgamation between the two militias, and

on the same day the Narva District Soviet accused the city militia of dividing and disorganizing the workers' militia. Such protests so escalated that, at a meeting of the Interdistrict Committee in July, representatives of the district soviets warned that they would refuse to co-operate with the government in its effort to disarm the population, calling it 'a counter-revolutionary assault on the working class.'²⁰ By mid-July the district soviets 'were becoming overwhelmingly suspicious of the government, increasingly exasperated with the temporizing of national Menshevik and SR leaders, and, gradually, more strongly attracted to the idea of creating a revolutionary soviet government.'²¹ The district soviets, in fact, were the first institutions to follow the factory committees in openly shifting their allegiances to the Bolsheviks. In August 1917, as we shall see, when General Kornilov tried to stage an uprising against the Revolution, it was largely the district soviets that mobilized the workers' militias against his plot. Throughout most of 1917 the district soviets, working with the factory committees and workers' militias, guarded the Revolution against emerging counter-revolutionary threats and against attempts by Mensheviks and SRs to rein in the masses.

SOLDIERS' COMMITTEES

Among the reserve troops billeted in cities, soldiers had easy access to newspapers and were exposed to a great deal of radical propaganda. But the front-line troops were isolated from worker-militants and revolutionary organizations, and in terms of political radicalism they generally lagged behind the soldiers in the city barracks. Nonetheless, after the fall of the autocracy and the promulgation of Order Number 1, agitators descended upon the front-line troops in hordes and helped to create a rich political culture consisting of political deputies and orators. A strong wave of democratic sentiment swept through the front-line committees, producing a seismic shift toward democracy and self-empowerment. Soldiers' committees and soviets proliferated everywhere, in companies, battalions, and regiments.

Soon representatives of the revolutionary socialist parties were organizing among the troops. Each party established a military committee, composed largely of reserves, that tried to propagandize the front-line troops. Where the front lines were close to major industrial cities, the committees established intimate contact with army rankers and tried to recruit them as members. Seldom, if ever, was a huge army brought so completely into the political life of a country. In the cities the gray coats of the garrisoned troops were to be seen everywhere: at mass meetings, in demonstrations, at soviet plenaries, and in

the dual power directly into the trenches and barracks. The military, in effect, was not only significantly politicized but was becoming 'sovietized' at the expense of the command at all levels of the army hierarchy.

PEASANT COMMITTEES

In the countryside the peasants had long wished for the expropriation and repartition of the estates of the tsar, the landlords, the clergy, and the state. In fact, they saw such actions as the first step toward the solution of their historic agrarian problems. But after the February Revolution the Provisional Government, faced with the task of land redistribution that the 'bourgeois revolution' was supposed to achieve, faltered disastrously. It appropriated the vast estates that belonged to the tsar, which naturally created a deep sense of expectation among the peasants and soldiers. But it delayed taking action to redistribute the Crown lands, postponing it to a future constituent assembly—whose date remained conspicuously unspecified.

Ever since Emancipation every governmental measure to give land to the peasants had been a fiasco. Now a revolution had ousted a 400-year-old autocracy—and distrustful peasants were told that land redistribution would be delayed. As time passed with no land distribution, and with legal avenues to redistribute the land foreclosed, the peasantry became deeply skeptical of the government's intentions and began overtly to challenge the existing agrarian system. First they committed small infractions, such as allowing their cattle to graze in a squire's meadow, or cutting wood from his forest without payment, or reaping hay from his meadows. When no Cossacks appeared to restrain them, they steadily grew bolder: they withheld payment for the land they leased and even raided the landlords' storehouses. Finally, when these acts of outright theft produced no punitive consequences, they went on to seize the unused land of the squire and turn it over to the local village commune for repartition.

Meanwhile the rural gentry were alarmed by the government's promise that land would be redistributed. Stolypin's law of November 1906, which made land alienable or subject to sale, was still very much in place. Accordingly the gentry began to sell its land at very low prices, especially to foreigners who were not subject to the Russian governmental policies and to 'separated' well-to-do peasants. The extent of these speculative practices alarmed the peasants: if land sales continued, it could mean that when land redistribution finally came, fewer allotments would be available for the peasants to acquire.

open-air rallies, characteristically wearing red armbands. Party newspapers, explicitly oriented toward soldiers' problems, including agrarian issues (a matter of deep concern to the peasants in uniform), were made available in large numbers, as was party literature.

The Bolsheviks were particularly canny in attending to the problems of the soldiers and sailors. They provided interested units, both in the reserve and on the front lines, with lecturers. In Petrograd the Bolshevik Military Organization, which was greatly influenced by left-wing Bolshevik worker-militants like Shliapnikov, established a soldiers' club where off-duty soldiers or men on leave could relax, drink, read periodicals, find comradeship, and listen to lectures. Many soldiers found their way into the Bolshevik Party through this club and began promoting the Bolshevik program among the troops.

Order Number 2 of the Petrograd Soviet, as we have seen, was issued expressly to prevent soldiers' committees from taking complete command of their units and electing their own officers. But as front-line conditions worsened, as the military situation deteriorated, and as disciplinary problems increased, ever more *de facto* power was shifted into the hands of the committees. Officers were obliged to deal with their subordinates with the utmost prudence, not only to gain their obedience but to survive assaults from the ranks. During the heated days of February, soldiers had arrested officers who were loyal to the autocracy and even shot or bayoneted them if they became overtly threatening. Officers found themselves increasingly trapped between the demands of military discipline and the overt hostility of the troops under their command. In time an officer dared not issue an order that might stir up the animosity of the ranks. Accordingly, officers prudently gained the advance agreement—and hopefully the active support—of a soldiers' committee. Many of the hated junior officers avoided reprisals by removing their epaulets and insignias.

The Petrograd Soviet reluctantly permitted the committees to retain their early authority. On 30 March, in conjunction with the Provisional Government, the Soviet officially legitimized the right of the soldiers to form their own committees. A committee, it specified, was to consist of three soldiers, including one officer, all of whom were to be elected by each company, cavalry squadron, and artillery battery. The committees' authority was ostensibly restricted to non-military matters, such as regulating rations, mediating grievances between soldiers and officers, and handling cultural and political activities (often including outright propaganda). In time, the formation of committees (whose members were increased from three to six in April) extended from the lower military echelons up to the regimental level. In the spring, the military committees held a congress of delegates from various armies and fronts to create a soviet of eleven officers and 22 rankers, bringing

By the late spring of 1917 a menacing peasant movement arose that demanded the complete prohibition of land sales. Peasant delegations trekked to the capital, where they were joined by soldiers—the conscripted and armed ‘peasants in uniform’, for whom land redistribution was the most compelling of all political and social issues. An All-Russian Congress of Peasants’ Deputies, composed of representatives from rural soviets, was convened in Petrograd between 4 and 28 May—the first national congress of its kind to meet in Russia—that issued a call for the transfer of all land to the peasantry.

The Provisional Government, however, ignored the call, even dismissing the peasants’ concern as an oafish exaggeration. Stymied, the peasants in the countryside took matters into their own hands and began to expropriate land outright from the gentry on their own initiative. Meeting in village assemblies presided over by their village elders, they voted, often in a quite orderly manner, calmly to take over a nearby estate, confiscating the squire’s land and livestock and redistributing it in the time-honored manner of the *chernyi peredel*. In fact they often left the landlord and his family enough grain and foodstuffs to tide them over to the next growing season—as well as a small land allotment. In other cases, however, the peasants drove the gentry off the land, if not by persuasion, then by threats.

Reports soon flowed into Petrograd that villages were forcing landlords to redistribute their land, that manors and monasteries were being seized, and that ‘separators’ from the *obshchina* were being compelled to return to the commune or abandon their land. The Provisional Government was outraged. On 21 April it banned land expropriations and set up an ‘orderly’ system of land reform—or more precisely, a system that would defer land reform to the unspecified future constituent assembly. In the meantime, the first minister of agriculture, Prince Shingarev, a Kadet provincial doctor, created an elaborate hierarchy of land committees, headed by a Main Land Committee, whose purpose was to adjudicate land disputes, collect information, and draft recommendations for a comprehensive land reform. As a concession, on 21 April the Provisional Government stipulated that the district land committees were to be made up exclusively of peasants. Many of the peasants who joined these committees, however, were soldiers on leave from the front whose military experience had trained them to act in an organized manner. Hence while the Main Land Committee obeyed the Provisional Government, the district land committees became instruments for more politically sophisticated peasants to legitimize the seizures of the great estates and monasteries.

In the autumn of 1917 peasants began to create their own soviets, guided neither by the Bolsheviks nor by the PSRs but primarily by the newly created Left SRs. Indeed the traditional PSR actually played a regressive role by preventing the peasants from uniting with the workers’ and soldiers’ soviets,

thereby closing the villages off from the most volatile forces in the Revolution. As Anweiler observes:

Peasant soviets at various levels generally remained independent of workers' and soldiers' soviets that existed alongside them. Very rarely was a soviet of workers, soldiers, and peasants' deputies formed; more frequently the soviets met in joint congresses within the provinces or their executive committees held joint deliberations. Social Revolutionaries, who predominated in the peasants' soviets, increasingly feared takeovers by more radical workers' and soldiers' soviets, and therefore resisted mergers.²²

While the Left SRs were making considerable progress in radicalizing the countryside, their parent party, the PSR, was fostering rural parochialism, keeping the proletariat and the peasants at a distance from each other. Despite Stolypin's reforms, communal sentiments were still very much alive in the countryside. The peasantry's traditional collectivism and equality in the *obshchina* had generated popular visions of a Communist society, to which even Marx had given qualified approval and which the increasingly literate working class could have helped modernize without damaging its egalitarian and collectivist values. The Revolution had opened the prospect of a melding of town and country, of self-governance with a strong sense of collective responsibility. As it was, Russian workers gradually tended to become assimilated into an industrial society, while in the countryside, peasants stagnated and provided mere muscle power for the industrializing cities.

In 1917, however, the relationship of the working class to the peasantry seemed not to concern the revolutionary parties, least of all those that fed on notions of urban and proletarian social hegemony. The problem that loomed above all others was the crisis in the locus of power that the February Revolution had opened. On one side stood a bourgeois liberal government that was committed to the continuation of the war and a delayed land redistribution. On the other side stood a popular power—the soviets and the committees—that were slowly coming into conflict with the very 'bourgeois democratic' institutions that were expected to bring modernity to a predominantly agrarian Russia. This profound contradiction would produce a split between town and country that haunted the Revolution for decades.

NOTES

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3. Quoted in Keep, *Russian Revolution*, p. 80.
4. Ibid.
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7. Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 149.
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13. Eduard M. Dune, *Notes of a Red Guard*, trans. and ed. Diane P. Koenker and S.A. Smith (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 51.
14. Hasegawa, 'Formation of the Militia', p. 316.
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16. Rex Wade, *Red Guards and Workers' Militias in the Russian Revolution* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1984), pp. 60, 67.
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20. Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1978), p. 79.
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CHAPTER 46 Parties and Programs

THE BOLSHEVIKS IN PETROGRAD

Among the host of competing organizations, institutions, and programs that descended on the Russian people during the Revolution, one question stands out that acquired decisive proportions: What kind of social order should replace the old monarchical system and its subsequent provisional government? Should it be a democratic, laissez-faire form of capitalism, as many liberals hoped? Should it be Marxian socialism, which many intellectuals and workers regarded as history's 'final chapter'? Or should it be anarchy of one kind or another, as many marginal strata and aesthetes desired? Over the course of nearly a year these social ideals and their corresponding organizational forms were put to the test of their historical viability. Played out in demonstrations, riots and endless conferences that were more like mass meetings than deliberative bodies, the Russian Revolution probed all the radical ideas and schemes that had emerged between 1789 and 1914, in order to determine which of them should replace Russia's tottering semi-feudal social system, with a few unique alternatives of its own.

By the beginning of 1917 the Bolshevik Party had declined from the relatively important workers' party it had been in 1914 to a relatively minor one, largely because of the severe repression it suffered at the beginning of the war. In the days immediately following the February Revolution, it emerged as a legal entity but its membership sank to its nadir. With only 2000 members in Petrograd, it was a minority party in nearly all the revolutionary institutions created by the Revolution. This poor showing made the Bolsheviks seem like the poor cousins of the Mensheviks. In contrast to the Mensheviks, who were a notable presence in the Duma and the legal workers' institutions, the major Bolshevik leaders were still in Siberia or in foreign exile. In Petrograd neighborhoods like the Vyborg and on the islands that made up the Kronstadt naval

base, the Bolsheviks were a lively presence, but for the most part the rank-and-file militants in the capital area either did not know of them or confused them with the Mensheviks.

In fact, the Petrograd Bolsheviks often had difficulties distinguishing themselves from other anti-war opponents of the regime. While they agreed with the Mensheviks that the February Revolution would usher in a long period of social change in which the capitalist class managed the economy and accelerated the country's technological development, it was hard to see how this could be done under a 'dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry' (as Lenin insisted) without establishing a parliamentary republic and replacing the redistributive village land system with systems of private property and large mechanized farms. The Bolsheviks differed from the Mensheviks mainly in viewing themselves as the most radical of working-class parties. Their task, as they saw it, was to try to create the most democratic regime possible, by maximizing the power of the workers and the landless peasants and establishing the technological pre-conditions for a socialist society. Once these goals were achieved, they would proceed to overthrow capitalism and establish a proletarian dictatorship—or rule by the proletarian majority created by the expansion of a relatively extended bourgeois industrial development.

Given this outlook, the Bolshevik leaders in revolutionary Petrograd necessarily accepted the course that the leading Mensheviks had charted. The first issue of *Pravda*, the party's official organ, ambiguously declared that 'the fundamental problem is to establish a democratic republic.'¹ Publicly the Russian Bureau of the Central Committee, faithful to Lenin's program, called for a 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry', but as Shliapnikov later recalled, he and his colleagues on the Bureau 'agreed with the Mensheviks that we were passing through the period of the breakdown of feudal relations, and that in their place would appear all kinds of "freedoms" proper to bourgeois relations'²—in short, a 'bourgeois democratic' regime based on liberal parliamentarism. At a meeting of the Executive Committee on 3 March, Molotov echoed Lenin by stating that all political power must be shifted to the soviet democracy, but as Sukhanov notes,

the opinion he expressed was not all that of his party. . . . On the following day we learned from the papers that on March 3rd the Petersburg Committee of the Bolsheviks had declared that 'it would not oppose the authority of the Provisional Government insofar as its activities corresponded to the interests of the proletariat and the broad democratic masses of the people.'³

Indeed, within the Executive Committee itself, many Bolsheviks went along

with the Mensheviks and conventional SRs: of the eleven Bolshevik members of the 39-member committee, Sukhanov notes, none voiced any objection on 1 March to the establishment of the bourgeois Provisional Government—thereby giving it a *de facto* vote of confidence. In the Soviet plenary vote the next day, only nineteen of the 40 Bolsheviks present opposed the transfer of power to the Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks' Petersburg Committee was equally tepid: it declared that it would 'not oppose the power of the Provisional Government insofar as' its ministers met various qualifying conditions. 'In essence,' Trotsky observed acidly, 'this was the position of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries—only moved back to the second line trenches.'⁴

The Bolshevik Party at this time, it should be emphasized, was far from being the monolithic, highly centralized organization that it became in later years. Indeed, until the early 1920s the party was torn by open disagreements and factional challenges, most of which were fought out in the party's public press. Many actions that seemed to be carefully planned by the Bolshevik Central Committee were actually conducted without the committee's approval and even against its wishes. The Menshevik Party and the PSR were no more democratic in formal terms than the Bolsheviks; they were simply more lax about procedures. The Bolsheviks simply placed a higher premium on party discipline than their socialist rivals. They would never have tolerated the pro-war views of a Kropotkin, who virtually foamed at the mouth every time he denounced a 'Zimmerwaldist' in his public addresses, but they patently tolerated factions that were opposed to the leadership on concrete issues.

The party's various institutions—from the Central Committee to the Petersburg Committee to the district committees—often functioned independently of and sometimes at odds with one another. As Robert Service observes in his survey of the party:

Local Bolshevik committees, while upholding ideas of centralism in theory, acted in practice as independent agencies of socialist revolution. They set their own policies, both domestic and international. Thus their behavior introduced an anarchic jaggedness to the neat pattern of democratic centralism [the party's organizational principle of centralism in action and democracy in decision making].⁵

In his excellent history of the revolution Alexander Rabinowitch emphasizes that the various Bolshevik Party organizations in Petrograd—the Central Committee, the Petersburg City Committee, the Military Organization, and the various district committees—each functioned 'with its own responsibilities and interests.'⁶ The nine-man Central Committee tried to persuade rather than order dissenting lower committees to obey its decisions. In fact, the Central

Committee itself was often divided internally. 'As elected in late April, 1917,' Rabinowitch notes, it generally 'about evenly split between individuals who usually could be counted on to follow Lenin and more moderate or "right" Bolsheviks of L.B. Kamenev's persuasion.'⁷

The immensely influential Petersburg City Committee was composed of representatives of the party's district committees; guided by a small executive commission, it steered a course between moderates and radicals. Sometimes it favored the more prudent tactics of the Central Committee, but because it had to answer to the district committees, it often supported their more militant views. During February, for example, the Petersburg Committee opposed participation in the Revolution, regarding the proletariat as unprepared to confront the tsarist regime; then in April, under Lenin's influence, it shifted rapidly to the left, placing its imprimatur on an accomplished fact.

The district committees, in turn, were closer to the workers than were the higher committees in the Bolshevik organizational hierarchy and often directly reflected their views by staking out positions farther to the left. Made up of representatives of the party's local and factory units and cells, these committees were interlocked with the factory committees, district soviets, and militias, as well as cooperatives and educational clubs, all of which often reacted militantly against attempts by the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government to impinge upon the gains made by the proletariat. In general the Bolshevik worker-militants held far more left-wing positions than did their Petrograd leaders. Instead of 'conditionally' supporting the Provisional Government, for example, district militants bluntly called for outright soviet power. The Vyborg District Committee, Trotsky tells us, called mass 'meetings of thousands of workers and soldiers, which almost unanimously adopted resolutions on the necessity of the seizure of power by the soviets.'⁸ But thereafter the Petersburg Committee actually censured the Vyborgers for raising the demand for soviet power as premature!

Finally, the Military Organization, created by the Petersburg City Committee in March 1917, was assigned the important task of propagandizing the garrison and the Kronstadt naval base. It had its own newspaper, *Soldatskaya Pravda* (Soldiers' Truth), and established its committees in garrison towns, as well as creating a soldiers' and sailors' club in the Kshesinskaya Mansion, where many soldiers and sailors spent their free time. Politically, the Military Organization was among the most radical of Bolshevik bodies: it was created

for the purpose of conducting revolutionary activity in the Petrograd garrison and at the Kronstadt naval base. . . . From its inception, the Military Organization enjoyed a surprisingly large measure of autonomy. Moreover, because of the uniformly radical spirit of its leadership, the mass pressure

from garrison followers desperate lest the socialist revolution occur too late to save them from death at the front, and the confidence inevitably inspired by substantial armed force, the Military Organization tended as a rule to stand to the left of the Central Committee on questions regarding the development of the revolution.⁹

As such the Military Organization often favored not only radical but even reckless tactical methods. Although it had policy differences with the Petersburg City Committee, they united at times to oppose the policies of the party's more prudent Central Committee.

It would be difficult to understand either the events of 1917 or the behavior of the Bolsheviks without recognizing the internal tensions and conflicts that pervaded the Bolshevik organization. The crises of 1917 provoked sharp differences among the party's various committees and within them, leading some party committees to take actions that others strongly opposed. Most notably, the issue of whether to support the Provisional Government produced sharp divisions within the Central Committee and especially within the Petersburg City Committee. The lower-level committees often felt free to go their own way, either ignoring or executing the decisions of the higher ones. The Petersburg Committee would simply disobey decisions of the Central Committee, while the district committees disobeyed the Petersburg Committee.

But in the end the Central Committee remained the most influential of all the party's committees, and in the latter half of March it moved noticeably to the right. On 6 March the Provisional Government had passed an amnesty law that permitted revolutionaries exiled to Siberia to return to Russia. This law provided the official mandate for Lev Kamenev and Joseph Stalin to return to Petrograd, which they did in mid-March. As senior members of the Central Committee, both men were in a position to formulate official party policy; and both quickly gave Bolshevik policy a moderate turn. Kamenev and Stalin interpreted Lenin's notion of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry' to mean that Russia had to pass through a 'bourgeois democratic' stage—indeed a bourgeois historical era—before a socialist revolution could hope to succeed. Under their influence the Petrograd Bolsheviks adopted what J.L.H. Keep calls a "soft" line toward the Provisional Government and the Soviet.¹⁰ Taking over editorial control of *Pravda*, they declared that the Bolsheviks would support the Provisional Government 'insofar as it struggles against reaction and counterrevolution.'¹¹ Moreover, although they enjoined the Provisional Government to seek a negotiated peace, they declared that as long as German troops were obeying the orders of the Kaiser, the Russian soldier's duty was to return bullet for bullet. This jingoistic position, in effect, amounted to an acceptance of 'revolutionary defensism'.

Advocating a collaborative policy with the Mensheviks, the Kamenev–Stalin duo brought the party ever nearer to the Menshevik orbit. At the beginning of April, in fact, they were planning a meeting to discuss a merger between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks that would have resulted in a single united party. They intended to hold this meeting at the end of the First All-Russian Conference of Soviets, which would meet in Petrograd from 29 March to 3 April. There Bolshevik and Menshevik leaders would discuss the unification of Russian Social Democracy, restoring the party as it had essentially existed before the split in 1903. This meeting, however, never achieved its goal: on the night before it was to occur, Vladimir Ilych Lenin finally arrived back in the Russian capital, after his European exile of nearly fifteen years.

THE APRIL THESES

At 11:30 on the evening of 3 April, Lenin, together with some 30 other Russian revolutionaries, returned to Petrograd. The Bolshevik exiles had asked the German government to permit them to travel through German-controlled territory into Russia in a 'sealed train', which meant that the railroad cars on which they traveled were to be regarded as an extraterritorial enclave: no soldier or officer of the belligerent countries could enter. In return, the exiles promised the German authorities that after they arrived in Russia, they would seek the release of German prisoners held by Russian authorities. While the journey was under way, Lenin was almost certainly fulminating at Kamenev's and Stalin's changes in the editorial policy of *Pravda*, which he regarded as breaches of revolutionary principle. Indeed, as soon as he reached Petrograd, he initiated his historic campaign to persuade the party to discard the 'revolutionary defensist' policy adopted by *Pravda*, oppose any continuation of the war, and demand that all state power be placed in the hands of the soviets.

A crowd of soldiers, workers, and Bolsheviks, as well as an armed honor guard of sailors, met Lenin when he arrived at Petrograd's Finland Station and disembarked from the sealed train. The Menshevik leaders were present to greet him formally in the name of the Petrograd Soviet. The Bolshevik leader was thereupon lifted to the top of an armored car, where he presented his own salutation that N.N. Sukhanov, who was present, has immortalized:

Dear Comrades, soldiers, sailors, and workers! I am happy to greet in your persons the victorious Russian revolution, and greet you as the vanguard of the worldwide proletarian army. . . . The piratical imperialist war is the beginning of civil war throughout Europe. . . . The hour is not far distant

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when at the call of our comrade, Karl Liebknecht, the people will turn their arms against their own capitalist exploiters. . . . The worldwide Socialist revolution has already dawned. . . . Germany is seething. . . . Any day now the whole of European capitalism may crash. The Russian revolution accomplished by you has prepared the way and opened a new epoch. Long live the worldwide Socialist revolution!¹²

By invoking Liebknecht and the German workers, and by appealing for a world socialist revolution, Lenin was throwing down a gauntlet to the leadership of the Bolshevik Central Committee as well as the Mensheviks. He further called for unequivocal opposition to the war—which unnerved the Central Committee's advocates of 'revolutionary defensism'.

Lenin was then taken to the Kshesinskaya Mansion, which the Bolsheviks had expropriated for their headquarters, for a small welcoming 'tea party', and then to a meeting of Bolshevik Petersburg City Committee members and delegates to the all-Russian soviet conference. On the next day, while the Menshevik delegates were patiently waiting on the floor below for their Bolshevik counterparts to join them in a discussion about restoring the old RSDWP, Lenin delivered a speech to the Bolsheviks that, according to Sukhanov, astonished nearly everyone present: 'It seemed as though all the elements had risen from their abodes, and the spirit of universal destruction, knowing neither barriers nor doubts, neither human difficulties nor human calculations, was hovering around Kshesinskaya's reception room above the heads of the bewitched disciples.'¹³ The speech presented the seven points—'April Theses', as they came to be called—that Lenin had written down in the sealed train.¹⁴

Contrary to existing Bolshevik thought, Lenin contended that Russia would not have to undergo a stage of 'bourgeois democracy' as a necessary precondition for a later proletarian revolution but could, in fact, skip over it. In what was little more than an ideological coup, he insisted that the 'bourgeois democratic' stage was now completed and the moment had come for Russia to undertake a proletarian revolution that would overthrow the 'bourgeois democracy' embodied in the Provisional Government:

The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that it represents a *transition* from the first stage of the revolution—which owing to the insufficient class consciousness and organization of the proletariat, led to the assumption of power by the bourgeoisie—to the *second stage*, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poor strata of the peasantry.¹⁵

The historic task that now lay at hand was to carry out the *second* stage of the revolution: the seizure of power by the proletariat and poor peasantry. Bolsheviks, he declared, must give no support to the Provisional Government and make no compromises with it; to the contrary, they must expose the utter falsity of all its promises. Similarly, they must give no support to the pro-war parties; to the contrary, the party must break decisively with the Mensheviks, and he excoriated the notion of reuniting the two wings of Russian Social Democracy. He appealed to the party to adopt a new name—the Communist Party—which would make the split with the Mensheviks definitive and irreparable.

Lenin's argument that the 'bourgeois democratic' stage of the revolution was complete as a socio-economic form may legitimately be regarded as theoretical nonsense. All that had changed in Russia since the February Revolution was the country's political structure. The Bolshevik leader, in effect, was making a caricature of Marx's 'stages' theory by grossly overlooking Marx's view that a long span of time would be needed for capitalism to remake the massively agrarian and politically absolutist empire that tsarism had produced over the centuries, with its many feudal (indeed 'Asiatic', in Marx's word) traits, and to transform the empire into a modern industrial nation. Lenin thus reduced the 'bourgeois democratic' phase of revolution to a mere change in political institutions. As of early April, Russia had patently completed no such phase.

Thus Lenin's theses were based less on a careful analysis of the Russian situation than on the international situation that existed in April 1917. The protracted war and the alluring prospect of European revolution encouraged the Bolsheviks to hope they could ignite a revolutionary firestorm in the West, a prospect that even Marx entertained as a possibility before his death. Indeed, Lenin's schematization of the February Revolution into a completed 'bourgeois democratic' stage—which was actually meant to involve many years of social development, not only a change in political institutions—was based on his hope that the Russian proletariat, by overthrowing tsarism, might induce the Western European proletariat, especially the German, to overthrow capitalism on the Continent. Even a seemingly socialist revolution in Russia, they hoped, could trigger a real socialist revolution in Central Europe and possibly elsewhere among the industrially advanced countries in the world. It would not be wrong to say that Lenin regarded revolution in Russia primarily as a 'spark' to produce a proletarian revolution in Germany.

The February Revolution of 1917 had also produced a phenomenon that neither Marx, nor Lenin, nor any other socialist theorist had foreseen—the emergence of a dual power. In addition to the bourgeois republic, February had produced a 'proletarian-peasant' government, embodied in the soviets,

supported by other institutions (factory committees, district and interdistrict soviet federations, and a vast popular committee system) to manage Russian society. The empowered institutions necessary to achieve a workable popular socialism in Russia were thus essentially at hand. So powerful were the soviets after the February Revolution that they would have had only to declare themselves the official government in Russia to annul the Provisional Government's limited authority.

Now Lenin went even further in overturning the sacred precepts of conventional Marxism: he dared to demand that *all* power be given to the soviets, or what he called a 'Commune state' in deference to the Parisian uprising of 1871. Where Lenin had once regarded the soviets merely as a possible *means* for insurrectionary mobilization, he now regarded them as *institutions* that would structure the new 'Commune state'. Only two days after he arrived in Russia, in an article called 'A Dual Power', he explained that the 'Commune state' was to be based on soviets as the ultimate repository of popular power:

Its fundamental characteristics are: 1) The source of power is not a law previously discussed and passed by parliament, but the direct initiative of the masses from below, in their localities—outright 'seizure', to use a popular expression; 2) The direct arming of the whole people in place of the police and the army, which are institutions separated from the people and opposed to the people; order in the state under such a power is maintained by the armed workers and peasants themselves, by the armed people itself; 3) Officials and bureaucrats are either displaced by the direct rule of the people or at least placed under special control; they not only become elected officials, but are also *subject to recall* at the first demand of the people; they are reduced to the position of simple agents ... and remunerated at a salary not exceeding that of a competent worker.¹⁶

Taken at face value, this program could easily be regarded as representing a form of libertarian socialism. The new polity would be based on the 'direct rule of the people', whose 'representatives' were the people's 'direct agents'. This was hardly a state in any exploitative or domineering sense of the term—indeed, the Petrograd Federation of Anarcho-Communists was also hailing the Paris Commune as a model and in May issued a newspaper called *Kommuna* (Commune) that called for modeling revolutionary Petrograd on the Paris Commune of 1871.

Other aspects of the theses were no less libertarian. Instead of calling for a system that would promote capitalist development in Russia, Lenin now favored institutions that might well inhibit it. Moreover, he demanded a people in arms and the elimination of the army—both libertarian socialist demands.

The 'April Theses,' observes Paul Avrich, were 'the kernel of a program that few anarchists would have disavowed.'¹⁷ Upon learning of them, many anarchists in Petrograd who had once bitterly opposed Lenin's notion of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' became convinced that he had genuinely altered his position to one that was quite consistent with their own and that he intended to abolish the state as soon as the Bolsheviks took it over.

If anarchists now felt a new solidarity with Lenin as a result of the April Theses, the leadership of his own party was for the most part aghast. Kamenev, for one, decidedly saw it as a breach of Marxist doctrine. Those Bolsheviks who had just voted, at the First All-Russian Conference of Soviets, not to reject the Provisional Government but to exercise 'vigilant control' over it through the soviet apparatus were embarrassed. Instead of discussing the speech with Lenin, however, the Bolshevik leaders received his words politely, then rushed off to meet the Mensheviks, who were still waiting for the unity discussion. Lenin, not to be overlooked, went with them and at the meeting presented his theses to the Mensheviks as well. The Mensheviks met his words with derision, jeering at each point Lenin made. By exempting Russia from the 'bourgeois democratic' stage, they scoffed, he was not only advancing a policy that was historically preposterous but was repudiating Marxism itself.

In fact, Lenin's April Theses produced the greatest shock and outrage among members of his own party. Sukhanov, moving around the hall, noted that Lenin was almost entirely isolated; only Alexandra Kollontai, a former *mezhrayonts*, and Shliapnikov gave him support. One Bolshevik, I. Goldenberg, who was drifting toward Menshevism, hooted derisively: 'Lenin has now made himself a candidate for one European throne that has been vacant for thirty years—the throne of Bakunin!'¹⁸ Goldenberg's description, ironically, was by no means inaccurate. By demanding, not a parliamentary state, but 'All power to the soviets!' Lenin was adopting the view of the militant workers in the Vyborg and other district committees.

The hostile response he received, however, did not deter Lenin. Immediately upon presenting his theses, he went to work to persuade the Bolsheviks of their validity. It was a difficult uphill struggle: on 8 April the Petersburg Committee voted (13:2) to reject the theses. But Lenin's powers of persuasion were formidable. Petrograd's district committees—the party institutions that were closest to the rank-and-file members—were the first to express support for the theses; the higher party committees one by one eventually followed suit. On 14 April the party finally voted to accept the theses; at the Seventh All-Russian Conference of the Bolsheviks, held in Petrograd on 24–29 April, the majority of delegates approved Lenin's call to reject the Provisional Government. Eventually, the Bolsheviks adopted the theses as a basic policy statement, as well as the slogan 'All power to the soviets!'

WORKERS' CONTROL AND LAND REDISTRIBUTION

With the coming of summer, workers in growing numbers began taking over their factories and establishing overt control over production. Lenin, who had made no mention of factory committees in his April Theses, rapidly began to adapt to this new situation, and hailed the committee movement as an expression of revolutionary power. On 17 May in *Pravda* he expressly endorsed the slogan 'workers' control of industry.' This was another conspicuous departure from conventional Marxism, which emphatically favored nationalized centralized economic planning. Russian Social Democracy, Menshevik and Bolshevik alike, had always disdained workers' control in favor of centralized state control of industry. In 1917, however, Lenin adopted that quasi-syndicalist approach—probably less out of ideological conviction than in an effort to court favor with Russia's decidedly libertarian workers.

He presented his new position at the First Conference of the Factory Committees of Petrograd and its Environs, which convened between 12 and 18 June. Lenin personally helped to draft the resolution on workers' control that the Bolsheviks introduced to the conference. 'The coalition government of which the "socialists" are now part,' the resolution declared, 'do nothing to achieve this control, and therefore it is completely understandable that the factory committees want *real* workers' control and not workers' control on paper only.'¹⁹ The Bolshevik leader's demand was scarcely distinguishable from that of the handful of anarcho-syndicalist delegates at the conference. Workers' control had now become a major part of the Bolshevik program.

By the time of the Bolsheviks' Sixth Congress which commenced on 26 July (at a time when the Petrograd Soviet seemed intent on trying to repress the Bolshevik Party), Lenin demanded that the party drop the slogan 'All power to the soviets!' altogether. According to Sergo Ordzhonikidze's memoir, Lenin told him: 'Now it is possible to take power only by means of armed uprising, which will come not later than September or October. We must transfer our main attention to the factory committees. They must be the organs of uprising.'²⁰ In 'The Tasks of the Revolution', which he wrote on 27 September, Lenin was explicit:

The Soviet government must immediately introduce workers' control over production and distribution on a nation-wide scale. . . . [In the absence of such control], all the promises of reforms and attempts to introduce them are powerless, and famine, accompanied by unprecedented catastrophe, is becoming a greater menace to the country week by week.²¹

The demand for workers' control profoundly impacted upon ordinary workers

and gained for the Bolsheviks an immense amount of support. The Petrograd proletariat leaned in a libertarian direction, however alien the word would have been to many of them. Although their consciousness varied from factory to factory, indeed from worker to worker, by early fall they had instituted some degree of workers' control in the majority of Petrograd factories.

Meanwhile, during the summer the soldiers at the front and in the garrisons were deserting the army *en masse* and returning to their villages to join the rising movement to expropriate the land. Like his policy on workers' control, Lenin's agrarian policy on land redistribution also underwent a change in the spring and summer of 1917. As a young man, Lenin had profoundly absorbed the agrarian views of Plekhanov-inspired Marxism, which expected capitalism to industrialize agriculture and proletarianize the peasantry. This 'advance' would make it possible for a 'workers' state' to nationalize and socialize agriculture. Indeed, Lenin had first gained widespread attention as a Marxist theorist by challenging *narodnik* hopes that Russian agrarian socialism would be structured around the *obshchina* and the *chernyi peredel*.

In late 1917, however, Lenin's position on traditional peasant practices changed radically. Breaking with Marxist agrarian convention, Lenin conspicuously adopted the SRs' program to rescue the land redistribution policy based on the *obshchina*. The Bolsheviks now called upon the peasantry and particularly the landless poor to seize the large estates outright and divide them, in *narodnik* fashion, among family households. Like his new support for workers' control, his new support for land redistribution seemed, to many Mensheviks, to fulfill Goldenberg's warning that the Bolshevik leader was behaving like the reincarnation of Bakunin.

During the late summer of 1917, in what is sometimes known as Bolshevism's 'libertarian' or even 'utopian' phase, Lenin played up to the most extreme views of the Russian masses, often in marked opposition to conventional Marxist tenets. The workers and peasants opposed the war—and so did Lenin, calling upon the army to fraternize with German troops on the front, elect their own officers, and honeycomb the army with rank-and-file committees in opposition to a centralized command. The workers wanted workers' control of the industrial-capitalist process—and so did Lenin, adopting a view that was alien to Marxism. The workers and peasants opposed bureaucracy and demanded soviet democracy, even amateurism in dealing with public affairs—and so did Lenin, who called for a 'Commune state' based on soviet power. The peasants wanted to expropriate land from the landlords and voiced a sweeping demand for the repartition of the land conducted by the *obshchina*—and so did Lenin. The image of a 'utopian' Lenin and other such mutations actually gained him considerable support among libertarian elements in Russia.

Did Lenin genuinely embrace the new program that he was advocating? Or was he simply willing to advance *any* radical slogan in 1917, provided it brought the Bolsheviks to power? To some extent, the new demands expressed a recognition, generated by the radical mood of the workers and soldiers, that the February Revolution did not conform to conventional Marxist dogma; but to an even greater extent, Lenin was guilty of outright demagoguery. In his less polemical writings the Bolshevik leader remained a very orthodox Marxist. He had thoroughly assimilated the kind of Marxism propounded by Plekhanov and Kautsky, which held that socialism could be organized only around a nationalized and planned economy guided by managers; that agriculture had to be industrialized; and that industry—especially in Russia—would have to be highly rationalized to promote economic, technological and cultural development. Before 1914 he and other Bolsheviks had written articles, tracts, and even books criticizing populism and emphasizing the importance of centralization, state control over industry and agriculture, and an authoritarian, indeed openly dictatorial Jacobin-type republic. He never professed to be an anarchist or a syndicalist, least of all a 'utopian'—a word that was particularly alien, even distasteful to him as a devout 'scientific socialist'.

To be sure, he also exhibited a uniquely Russian admiration for the *narodniks*, and he personally possessed a lively streak of *narodnik* boldness. Although he repeatedly attempted to justify his views by quoting Marx and Engels, in practice his Marxism was less than principled. He often—perhaps unconsciously—accepted the *narodnik* emphasis on the role of will in history, and he was an insurrectionary by disposition, for whom exhibitions of bravado and even terror were acceptable. He greatly admired the 'practicals' in the Russian revolutionary movement, such as the colorful Georgian Bolshevik Komo, who staged a particularly daring expropriation in Tiflis and, later, the Ukrainian anarchist guerrilla fighter Nestor Makhno.*

A consummately practical man himself—indeed, a *realpolitiker*—Lenin was prepared to improvise upon Marxian precepts whenever he faced a new situation. One of his favorite maxims, '*On s'engage et puis on voit*' (loosely translated, 'Let's just do it, then we'll see'), borrowed from Napoleon, seems to have guided many of his political acts during 1917. By disposition, he was

* Makhno, for his part, acknowledged (admiringly, although anarchists regarded such admiration as heresy) that Lenin was a revolutionary. Lenin reciprocated by providing Makhno with the papers and contacts necessary for his return to the Ukraine. In contrast to Kropotkin, who found Makhno uncouth and formed a rather negative picture of him, there is every reason to believe that the remarkable Ukrainian partisan leader and the head of the Bolsheviks found each other attractive, notwithstanding their differences in ideology and the tragic circumstances that forced them to fight with each other years later.

personally inclined to go along with the predisposition of Russian workers and peasants for direct action, jettisoning one long-held position after another as new possibilities arose to gain state power for his party. Lenin, in effect, was more of a pragmatist than a theorist, and more of a voluntarist than a passive believer in the existence of inexorable laws of history that rendered socialism a historical inevitability.

The war and the success of the February Revolution had profoundly radicalized the Russian workers and the peasants-in-uniform. The April Theses, in effect, consisted of very broad formulas for gaining control over an increasingly libertarian revolution. Without following a left-libertarian strategy, indeed, a syndicalist-*narodnik* one, Lenin could not have gained widespread support among the Russian workers and peasants. Accordingly, the Bolshevik leader was prepared to say and do almost anything that would make it possible for his party to take state power and push Europe, if possible, into a 'world revolution'. Given the extraordinary circumstances produced by the war, he was patently convinced that he had only to give history a push, to make his movement into a vanguard of a European socialist revolution.

THE ANARCHISTS

In the summer of 1917, something very close to a syndicalist outlook guided the behavior of the Petrograd workers. At such a historical moment, it might be supposed, anarcho-syndicalist organizers would be eager to enter the soviets, factory committees, and all the remarkably popular institutions created by the Revolution, and work to build their movement. But anarchists as a whole failed to give due recognition to the rare opportunity that the soviets afforded them as a means to achieve their social ideals. In 1917, as in 1905, most anarchists avoided the soviets; they regarded them as arenas for political parties—in effect, as small political parliaments. They permitted the highly malleable workers' and soldiers' councils—which could very well have served as federative or co-ordinating bodies—to go their own way and largely contented themselves with *ad hoc* and theatrical actions.

After the collapse of the monarchy, the Petrograd Federation of Anarchist-Communists—the capital's largest anarchist 'organization', if such it can truly be called—appropriated the villa of General Durnovo as its headquarters. The villa, located in the Vyborg District, had spacious gardens that the anarchists used for a children's playground, and rooms that the anarchists used for classes, discussion groups, and other public activities. When the major

anarcho-syndicalist writer known as Voline arrived in Petrograd that summer, he was startled by the absence of serious anarchist activity:

When I returned to Russia from abroad and arrived in Petrograd in the early part of July, 1917, I was struck by the impressive number of Bolshevik notices announcing meetings and lectures in all parts of the capital and suburbs, in public halls, in factories, and in other gathering places. I didn't see a single Anarchist notice. . . . And I observed at the same time, with bitter disappointment, that there was not in the capital a single Anarchist newspaper nor any oral Anarchist propaganda.²²

Voline tried to remedy the situation in August by co-initiating a weekly anarcho-syndicalist newspaper:

It was not until August, and with great difficulty, that a little group of Anarcho-Syndicalists, consisting mainly of comrades returned from abroad, finally succeeded in starting a weekly newspaper, *Golos Truda*, The Voice of Labour, in Petrograd. As for oral propaganda, however, there were scarcely three or four comrades in that city capable of performing it.²³

By Voline's own admission, their efforts were too limited to have a significant impact on the Revolution. Perhaps the greatest single problem that the Russian anarcho-syndicalists faced was the bias of the purist anarchists generally against the formation of organizations. The distinction between pure anarchists and syndicalists cannot be drawn too sharply. The commitment of the purists to raw popular spontaneity superseded their willingness carefully to organize an effective movement. Nor did serious and responsible workers respond to their idiosyncratic lifestyles: the Petrograd Federation of Anarchist-Communists, in particular, composed of highly volatile and often unstable individuals, issued wildly inflammatory—and often laughable—leaflets, calling for uprisings on every conceivable occasion. Very significantly, the Federation showed little or no concern for the systematic preparation of its activities, let alone long-range work among the masses. Apart from declamatory statements, it made little or no attempt to formulate a coherent program. Indeed, the Federation had no strategic policy at all for overthrowing the government and offered no institutional structure to replace the old regime. On the contrary, the Federation apparently believed that a revolutionary continuum would instinctively and spontaneously emerge from below and bring together a delineable and co-ordinated course of action. Thus the Federation's members were mainly engaged in provocative actions—notably raids on jails, seizures of property, and scattered potshots at the police.

By contrast, the anarcho-syndicalists were made of sterner stuff. Most of them focused their efforts on the factory committees, to which relatively sympathetic workers elected them. But they were unable to take full advantage of the strongly libertarian consciousness that prevailed in the plants, not least because of anarchism's organizational inadequacies. Without a well-organized faction or federation, they were easily outmaneuvered by the Bolsheviks, who shrewdly combined their newly adopted libertarian views with a well-structured organization. In practice Russian anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists generally aligned themselves with the Bolsheviks in demonstrations and street actions. After the October Revolution a large number of them joined the Bolshevik Party or the new soviet administration. Some worked so closely with the government that they acquired the sobriquet 'soviet anarchists' and were given important positions by the Bolsheviks in the new regime.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1932), p. 1:287.
2. Ibid.
3. N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917*, ed. and trans. Joel Carmichael (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 191.
4. Trotsky, *Russian Revolution*, p. 1:286.
5. Robert Service, 'The Bolshevik Party', in *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution, 1914-1921*, ed. Edward Acton, Vladimir Iu. Cherniaev and William G. Rosenberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 235.
6. Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 5.
7. Ibid.
8. Trotsky, *Russian Revolution*, p. 1:286.
9. Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution*, p. 6.
10. John L.H. Keep, *The Russian Revolution: A Study in Mass Mobilization* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), p. 559.
11. Trotsky, *Russian Revolution*, p. 1:290. 'Insofar as' became a magical phrase not only among the Bolshevik leaders but also in the Executive Committee of the Soviet. The socialist parties continually used it to render their capitulations to the Provisional Government less unsavory.
12. Quoted in Sukhanov, *Russian Revolution*, p. 273.
13. Ibid., p. 280.
14. These seven theses were soon elaborated into ten and were published in *Pravda* under the title 'The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution (Theses)'. Kamenev, in an accompanying comment, designated them a 'personal' document of Lenin, reflecting his own opinion, rather than the official party position. See V.I. Lenin, 'Tasks of the Proletariat and the Present Revolution', in *Collected Works* (Moscow:

Foreign Language Publishing House, 1960), p.24:21-6, from which I have taken the quotations.

15. Ibid.

16. V.I. Lenin, 'A Dual Power', *Pravda* (Apr. 9, 1917), in *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1943), p. 6:27-8.

17. Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 127, 128.

18. Sukhanov, *Russian Revolution*, p. 287.

19. The resolution is quoted in Frederick I. Kaplan, *Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labor, 1917-1920: The Formative Years* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1968), pp. 56-7.

20. Quoted in William Henry Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1935), p. 1:184.

21. V.I. Lenin, 'The Tasks of the Revolution', in *Collected Works*, p. 26:65.

22. Voline, *The Unknown Revolution, 1917-1921* (New York: Free Life Editions, 1974), p. 185.

23. Ibid.

CHAPTER 47 Toward Red October

THE CRISIS OVER WAR AIMS

The Provisional Government had arisen from a Duma Committee, which itself was the product of a Duma that had been created under the restrictive suffrage of 1907 and had no revolutionary legitimacy. It was thus understood to be only a temporary regime. But the question of what kind of government would succeed it remained in doubt: Would Russia become a republic? A constitutional monarchy? A federation of free states? The answer was deferred to an unspecified constituent assembly whose meeting the government kept delaying. These delays fed the deep sense of mistrust that pervaded the workers and peasants, even toward the tepid Petrograd Soviet. Most gravely, as we have seen, the government deferred all questions of land reform to the future constituent assembly. It thus opened the prospect of old Russia's most frightening eventuality—the outbreak of a huge peasant war.

The only government the masses truly recognized were the executive committees of the country's soviets. The soviets, or rather those that were closest to the people they represented, wanted enough power to be able to stand guard over the revolution and accordingly withheld full authority from a bourgeois government. Indeed, a plenary of the Petrograd Soviet on 2 March resolved that sitting members of the Soviet Executive Committee could not become ministers in the Provisional Government. (This provision seemed not to apply to Alexander Kerensky, who combined the positions of vice-chairman of the Petrograd Soviet's Executive Committee and minister of justice in the Provisional Government.) In any case, the Petrograd Soviet's Executive Committee fatally kept trying to use its authority to validate the Provisional Government, supporting the Provisional Government's policies '*insofar as they corresponded to the interests of the proletariat and of the broad democratic masses of the people*', to use its tedious formula for surrender to the ostensibly hegemonic status of the bourgeoisie.

Committed as it was to the Provisional Government, the Executive Committee found itself the object of increasing scorn and hostility by the Petrograd masses. The Bolsheviks shrewdly exploited this disaffection: they made the immediate convocation of a constituent assembly a major programmatic demand. This demand, together with their call for workers' control and land redistribution, made their program simply a recipe for grabbing the reins of power. And fortunately for the Bolsheviks, the fatuous Provisional Government inadvertently did much to aid them.

Shortly after the February Revolution, the Soviet's Executive Committee and the Provisional Government were faced with the challenge of defining Russia's war aims. Before February many socialists had been adamantly opposed to continuing the conflict. But afterward, with a republic in place, the nature of the war had, in their eyes, changed. Most Mensheviks and SRs, as we have seen, now argued that it was necessary to defend the new, progressive Russian republic against Prussian militarism. 'Revolutionary defensism' became the conventional socialist position—to be distinguished from 'patriotic defensism', the support that monarchists and their bourgeois allies gave to the war. Where patriots called for the defense of the 'Motherland', onetime Internationalists now clamored for the defense of the 'Revolution'. PSR leader Victor Chernov, an erstwhile Zimmerwaldian, became a 'revolutionary defensist', as did the Mensheviks Chkheidze and Tseretelli, who had previously opposed war credits. In fact, Tseretelli's opposition to the war had even caused him to be exiled to Siberia.

Despite their support for the war, Russia's new socialist rulers nonetheless had to invoke the need for worldwide proletarian solidarity and a peace without compensation. Hence on 14 March the Executive Committee issued a ringing 'Call By the Petrograd Soviet to the Peoples of the World'. This 'emotional, verbose, and confused document,' as Michael T. Florinsky describes it, strongly endorsed peace, renounced imperialist war aims, and was committed to fighting a strictly defensive war. Using socialist jargon to strike an anti-imperialist tone, it addressed itself to 'Comrade-proletarians, and toilers of all countries': 'Conscious of its revolutionary power, the Russian [soviet] democracy announces that it will, by every means, resist the policy of conquest of [Russia's former] ruling classes, and it calls upon the peoples of Europe for concerted, decisive action in favor of peace.' The Call further appealed to workers in other countries to make an international proletarian revolution that would end the war and allow for such a non-imperialist peace:

We are appealing to our brother-proletarians of the Austro-German coalition, and, first of all, to the German proletariat. From the first days of the war, you were assured that by raising arms against autocratic Russia, you

were defending the culture of Europe from Asiatic despotism. . . . Now even this justification is gone: democratic Russia cannot be a threat to liberty and civilization.

Despite these avowals other passages in the Call were fully in accord with a continuation of the war. 'The Russian revolution will not retreat before the bayonets of conquerors,' it proclaimed, 'and will not allow itself to be crushed by foreign military force.' By committing the Soviet to the defense of 'our own liberty from all reactionary attempts from within, *as well as without*,' the Executive Committee was actually resolving to support the war until such time as an international proletarian revolution took place. The Call was a 'revolutionary defensist' statement, prepared by a Soviet Executive Committee that included former Zimmerwaldians.

The Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary press greeted the Call with effusive enthusiasm. The socialist newspapers saw it as a repudiation of the old regime's expansionism, the opening of a new era in foreign policy, and a first step toward ending the conflict. But the Call also raised problems for the Russian bourgeoisie: although it reassuringly promised to keep Russia in the war until the Kaiser's government fell, its anti-imperialist tone and territorial renunciations were highly disconcerting to Russia's capitalist class.

Imperialism During the course of a press conference on 23 March, Milyukov stated that Russia's war aims actually included the absorption of the Ukrainian provinces of Austria-Hungary into Russia and the takeover of Constantinople and the Straits. These remarks embarrassed the Soviet, and even the Menshevik press denounced them as evidence of the government's hypocrisy, declaring that they undermined the Revolution's goal of a peace without imperialist annexations. To ease the growing furor, on 27 March the Provisional Government tried to reassure its citizens that Russia did not seek 'domination over other nations, or seizure of their national possessions, or forcible occupation of foreign territories.'² This statement was intended for domestic consumption, but on 18 April Milyukov sent it on to the Allied powers—accompanied by a covering note that emphasized Russia's commitment to Allied war aims and declaring that 'while *safeguarding the rights of our own country*, [we] will, in every way, observe the obligations assumed toward our Allies.' It claimed, contrary to all fact, that 'the aspiration of the entire nation to carry the world war to a decisive victory has grown more powerful' since the Revolution.³

Milyukov's note of 18 April, when it became public, nearly sparked an insurrection. On 20 and 21 April Bolshevik rank-and-file delegates demanded that the overthrow of the Provisional Government be placed at the head of the party's agenda. As Alexander Rabinowitch observes:

On April 20, when raging mobs were gathered at the Mariinsky Palace [the seat of the Provisional Government], some district delegates at the afternoon session of the First Bolshevik Petrograd City Conference appealed for the immediate overthrow of the Provisional Government, and V.I. Nevesky of the [Bolshevik] Military Organization spoke out in favor of mobilizing troops, evidently for agitational activity on behalf of seizure of the power by the Soviet. . . . S.Ia. Bogdatiev [of the Petersburg Committee] is credited with having prepared a leaflet over the signature of the Petersburg Committee appealing for the immediate overthrow of the Provisional Government.⁴

On the same day the Finnish Reserve Guards came out with other fully armed units of the Petrograd garrison to the Maryinsky Palace, carrying placards that declared 'Down with Milyukov!', 'Down with annexationist policies!' and—in a slogan that suggested Bolshevik influence—'Down with the Provisional Government!' The Finns and their supporters were joined by a detachment of Kronstadt sailors, whose banners blazed the slogan 'All power to the soviets!' Before long Petrograd was rocked by tumultuous demonstrations in opposition to Milyukov's note—and by counter-demonstrations in its favor. The street fights, which cost about four lives, did not come to an end until the evening of 21 April, when the Soviet issued a two-day ban on demonstrations and the Provisional Government published a retraction of Milyukov's note. Milyukov, for his part, was obliged to resign from the government. Still, the turmoil engendered by his note had so weakened the Provisional Government that, in order to save itself, it had to invite Mensheviks and SRs from the Executive Committee to join it.

On 1 May, without consulting the Soviet's plenum, the Executive Committee voted 41 to 18 in favor of allowing its members to join the bourgeois government. (The nays consisted mainly of Bolsheviks and Martov's Menshevik-Internationalists.) It thus sent Chkheidze, Tseretelli, Skobelev and Chernov, among others, to join Kerensky as ministers. This was a truly extraordinary decision. By entering a bourgeois government, the Mensheviks and SRs were violating one of the most sacred tenets of Social Democracy. It had been a cornerstone of revolutionary Marxist policy that no socialist should accept a ministerial post in a bourgeois government—not even in one that had emerged from the loins of a 'bourgeois democratic' revolution. Marxists were expected to retain complete political independence of the capitalist state and function as critical guardians of the proletariat's interests. The Mensheviks and SRs, in effect, had retreated to what Marxists called a 'Millerandist' strategy, in order to legitimize the bourgeois state and render it politically viable. But the masses were not familiar with Marxian theory and, contrary to Marxist doctrine, were eager to have 'their own men' inside the government as a step

demonstrations

toward a socialist takeover of the state. Far from denouncing the socialist entry into the cabinet, working-class opinion generally supported it. For the masses who were unschooled in Marxist doctrine, power was simply power—whatever its form—and those who wielded it were to be supported as long as they did so in the interests of the working class.

Accordingly the old cabinet was reshuffled, and on 5 May a new Coalition Government was formed, in which Kerensky was given the Ministry of War and Marine; the sugar magnate Mikhail Tereschenko replaced Milyukov as minister of foreign affairs; the wealthy industrialist Alexander Konovalev became the minister of trade and industry; Prince Lvov was kept on as prime minister; and the remaining posts were filled by men of no particular distinction. As if to place the full weight of the Revolution's most basic problems on socialist shoulders, Chernov was given the Ministry of Agriculture, and Skobelev the Ministry of Labor; but Tseretelli, who remained very active in the Petrograd Soviet, was given the politically neutral Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs. Including Kerensky, there were now six self-professed socialists and ten 'capitalist' ministers in the new Coalition Government. Now that its leading members held ministerial posts, the Soviet gave official recognition to the Coalition Government as the sole state authority. The Executive Committee thereafter played the role of the cabinet's defender and alter ego, guarding the flanks, rear, and now even the front of the Coalition Government from the growing tide of its radical opponents.

THE MILITARY OFFENSIVE

In the meantime, especially by April, the Russian army was experiencing mass desertions. Entire units were drifting away from the front or refusing to fight. Commanders were increasingly fearful that their troops, when ordered to attack, would aim their rifles at their officers instead of the enemy. Generals spoke of leaving most of the army unused and throwing only selected units or 'shock troops' against thinned-out parts of the German lines.

At the same time the Allies were planning to launch offensives on the Western Front. To strengthen their prospects of success, French and British diplomats began pressuring the Russians to open a new offensive of their own on the Eastern Front, which would compel the German commanders to transfer their forces from west to east. Thus early in May the new Coalition Government laid plans of its own to launch a phased military offensive along the Eastern Front, beginning in the southwest against the Austrians and then if possible rolling against German-held lines in the center and north. The Co-

alition Government witlessly expected to activate its dormant Eastern Front, bolster the morale of its troops there, and restore Russia's prestige and dwindling patriotic ardor. Hopes ran high within the cabinet that, with the passing of the autocracy, a new Russian soldier had been created who would exhibit extraordinary nationalistic valor.

But would the Petrograd Soviet support the new government's endeavor to mount an offensive? Its recent Call, rippling with rhetoric about international proletarian solidarity and appeals for peace, suggested that the Soviet might refuse to throw uniformed Russian peasants against their German brothers. As it turned out, however, the Executive Committee, with incredible naïveté, not only endorsed the offensive but even promoted the sale of war bonds. Kerensky, who still occupied positions in both the Executive Committee and the Coalition Government, effused to the Allies that the Revolution had rejuvenated the Russian army as a military force. But as this notoriously unstable, often hysterical man toured the front to stir up rank-and-file excitement for the offensive, signs of a rejuvenation were scarce: the sullen troops who listened to him dreaded the coming bloodbath into which they were being led.

Tseretelli, for his part, mingled with the Petrograd workers whom he professed to represent and tried to compare the coming offensive to the onward march of the French revolutionary armies of 1793. The reception he got was tepid at best and often angry. Chernov, in turn, tried to steer clear of giving the offensive his full endorsement without resigning from his ministerial position. The Bolsheviks, the Menshevik-Internationalists, and the increasingly numerous Left Socialist Revolutionaries (Left SRs) vocally emphasized that the Executive Committee's support for the offensive flatly contradicted the Soviet's call for an end to the war. During these simmering months the socialists showed themselves to be myopic toward the crisis—indeed, the revolutionary situation—that they themselves were creating.

THE 10 JUNE DEMONSTRATION

By mid-June the news that an offensive was being planned was generating widespread unrest in the Petrograd garrison, fearful that it might soon be decimated in a new bloodletting, for a war it detested.

Petrograd was becoming increasingly radicalized. The Bolsheviks had acquired a majority of the deputies in the Workers' Section of the Petrograd Soviet (albeit still not in the Soldiers' Section). Together with the Menshevik-Internationalists and the Left SRs, who also opposed the war, they collectively comprised two-fifths of the Soviet's full plenum. The Petrograd factory com-

bolsh popularity
 mittees were completely supportive of the Bolsheviks—the workers had shifted to the left in a matter of weeks. The Putilov workers, initially influenced by the PSR, went overwhelmingly over to the Bolsheviks in a span of only two months. In Moscow the Bolsheviks comprised the largest single deputation in the city's soviet, although they were still a minority by comparison with the joint deputations of the Mensheviks and SRs. The Bolshevik slogan 'All power to the soviets!', however, was gaining enormous credibility among workers and soldiers in Moscow, who otherwise knew very little about the Bolshevik program.

Even more advanced politically than the Petrograd and Moscow workers were the sailors and soldiers garrisoned at the nearby Kronstadt naval base. Less than a month after the February Revolution, the Kronstadters were demanding 'all power to the soviets', and as early as 17 March their soviet, which was by no means controlled by the Bolsheviks, officially declared itself an independent 'commune', recognizing only the authority of the Petrograd Soviet. The island thereby became, as Trotsky called it, 'a herald of the advancing second revolution.'⁵ Although the Kronstadters reluctantly acknowledged the authority of the Coalition Government, in practice the naval fortress functioned independently of the capital and became a piercing thorn in the side of the Petrograd Soviet and the Coalition Government alike.

The Petrograd Soviet's Executive Committee, eager to counter this burgeoning radicalism, tried to pit the country as a whole against the capital that it ostensibly represented by deciding on 3 June to convene the much-awaited First All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Essentially, the Congress was a mass mobilization of Russia's provincials against its revolutionary center. Approximately 1300 delegates from more than 300 local and 53 district, regional, army, and even some peasant soviets were summoned from many parts of Russia to appear in the spacious Cadet Corps building in Petrograd. Not surprisingly, only a fifth of the delegates were Bolsheviks and Internationalists; the overwhelming majority identified themselves as SRs and Mensheviks. Their political sophistication was very low, and their understanding of these parties' ideas and shifting political allegiances was meager.

The First All-Russian Congress of Soviets more than afforded the Coalition Government an opportunity to use the provincial delegates to countervail the radical developments in Petrograd, Kronstadt and Moscow. When it came time to vote on the entry of socialists into the Coalition Government, the majority of provincial delegates gave it a resounding vote. They even refused to pass a resolution in favor of the eight-hour day. And most significantly, they voted in favor of continued participation in the war and the forthcoming offensive.

To formulate national policy between future all-Russian soviet congresses and to exercise ongoing control over all the soviets in Russia, the Congress of Soviets established a Central Executive Committee (CEC), corresponding in national authority to that of the Petrograd Soviet's Executive Committee. Moreover, the Congress gave the Mensheviks and SRs a majority in the CEC. Finally, it also prohibited any demonstrations from taking place in the capital unless they were authorized by the Petrograd Soviet. This last restriction was a matter of considerable concern in the capital: on 23 May the soldiers of the Petrograd garrison, inspired by the radical Bolshevik Military Organization, had decided to hold a mass demonstration to protest against the coming offensive. The strongly pro-Bolshevik First Machine Gun Regiment, in fact, was eager to stage an armed demonstration, and it resolved to take to the streets with arms regardless of what the party decided, pledging to respond only to orders that came from the Military Organization. Although Lenin initially supported the action, Krupskaya, his wife and his closest party comrade, expressed concern that the demonstration could lead to violence, followed by government repression. A failed insurrection at this point, it could be argued, would have grim consequences for both the party and the Revolution.

Then in early June a sudden explosion of strikes swept through the Vyborg District, precipitated by the government's attempt to evacuate the Durnovo villa, the headquarters of the Federation of Anarchist-Communists. On 5 June a group of anarchist-communists—with characteristic adventurism—had 'expropriated' a printing press and brought it to the villa. The next day the minister of justice, P. Pereverzev, forced them to return the press, then on 7 June gave the anarchists 24 hours to evacuate the premises or face forcible eviction. For the anarchists the moment of revolution seemed at hand, and they fecklessly called upon the Vyborg workers and Kronstadt sailors to come to their aid. Thousands of workers went out on a sympathy strike the next day, closing down 28 factories. More seriously, they were joined by a number of troop contingents and 50 armed Kronstadt sailors who holed up with the anarchists in the villa, vowing to meet any attempt to remove them with force. A confrontation was avoided only when the Soviet sensibly intervened and prevented the government from taking action.

To the Bolsheviks, the strong turnout for the anarchists was evidence that the workers would in fact be willing to join the soldiers in a common demonstration against the offensive. At a meeting on 8 June the party's Central Committee met with the Petersburg City Committee, the Military Organization, and representatives of sympathetic trade unions, regiments, and factories, and decided to call a joint demonstration for 10 June. Its principal goals would be to protest the offensive and the war and demand the transfer of power from the Coalition Government to the soviets. The Bolshevik leadership vetoed any

attempt to turn the demonstration into an insurrection, however, warning that the time was not ripe. The Bolsheviks still lacked sufficient support among the people of Petrograd, Lenin had concluded, let alone among frontline troops and especially in the country at large. But with an impending military offensive that was certain to fail and the beginnings of a peasant war in the rural areas, the Bolshevik leader concluded that time was on the party's side. Hence restraint was to be the order of the day, and strict party discipline was invoked to ensure it.

To prevent the Mensheviks and SRs from sabotaging the plan for the demonstration, the Bolshevik organizers vowed to keep it a secret until the morning of 10 June. But news of the plan reached the Executive Committee, which accused the Bolsheviks of planning a coup. To diminish the demonstration's size, if not abort it altogether, the Menshevik- and SR-dominated CEC of the Congress of Soviets (which was still meeting in Petrograd) in the early morning hours of 10 June dispatched about 500 delegates in groups of ten to the workers' districts and the soldiers' barracks to try to dissuade the masses from 'coming out'.

Finally, in a tension-filled morning meeting the full Bolshevik Central Committee voted to cancel the demonstration—over the wishes of the Petersburg City Committee, the Military Organization, and even some of its own members—and ordered the Military Organization to visit the workers and soldiers and inform them of the cancellation. The workers and troops complied, and the demonstration did not take place. But the provincial delegates who were sent out to cancel it were met with intense hostility; the regiments that had initiated the plan for the demonstration registered the most intense outrage and disgust—and their reaction effectively taught the provincials that the workers and soldiers of Petrograd detested both the government and the war. Far from winning support for their moderate views, the provincial delegates found their own loyalty to the Coalition Government greatly shaken.

In June 1917 the Petrograd workers were clearly far more radical than the rest of the country—and the Bolshevik rank and file were more radical and zealous than their party leadership. This deepening revolutionary sentiment was due in great measure to the influx of new, inexperienced, and undisciplined members into the party, whose membership leaped fifteenfold between February and July, from 2000 to 30,000. Thus was the finely tuned cadre organization of 'professional revolutionaries' that Lenin had built after 1903 transformed into a mass organization of militants. But these new workers and soldiers were politically unsophisticated; they desperately needed resolute revolutionary leadership to steer clear of further unfocused, premature actions like the Durnovo incident that could have unwittingly set the Revolution back rather than advance it.

To provide this leadership, the party had to establish better organizational ties with its newer members and with the workers and soldiers generally. It had to be able to restrain the membership, when necessary, without stifling its militancy and creativity. And it had to retain and develop its flexibility, its capacity shrewdly to nuance its strategy in a period of social upheaval—a capacity that was largely absent among the groups that mouthed ultra-leftist notions rooted in instinct rather than rationality. Personally, Lenin was deeply suspicious of popular militancy, regarding it as errant and chaotic; nor did he trust the capacity of militants, however zealous and heroic, to create lasting grassroots institutions of their own, such as soviets and factory committees. He supported only those popular actions and institutions that had been carefully schooled in Bolshevik ideas. But in 1917 the political situation was changing too rapidly for his stringent views, and events often obliged him to assent to actions with which he disagreed, lest the party lose its influence among the inexperienced workers and soldiers in its rapidly swelling membership. Thus in the summer of 1917 the Bolshevik Party, which Lenin had intended to be highly centralistic, became, for a while, a remarkably open movement in which leaders and masses interacted freely. The party's greatest single asset was Lenin's insistence on discipline and responsibility, as well as the party's adherence to the core ideas that gave it its identity and sense of revolutionary purpose.

THE JULY DAYS

After the Bolsheviks aborted the 10 June demonstration, Tseretelli and other right-wing Mensheviks on the Executive Committee and in the Coalition Government tried to use the crisis to disarm the Bolsheviks and ostracize them from the Soviet. On 11 June Tseretelli accused the Bolsheviks of steering a course toward an armed seizure of power and warned: 'We cannot satisfy ourselves [merely] with an ideological fight with the Bolsheviks and verbal prohibitions of armed demonstrations, but must at the same time adopt practical measures to make it impossible for them to conduct armed attacks on the democratic system.'⁶ Tseretelli's grim warning that he would fight the Bolsheviks by force, however, went too far even for some members of his own party, who recognized that to circumscribe the Bolsheviks might provide a troubling precedent against even moderate socialists. In the end he was beaten down by his Menshevik comrades F. Dan, B. Bogdanovitch and L. Khinchuk, who reproached Tseretelli for proposals that ran counter to the spirit of the 'democracy' and that might end up benefiting even the Bolsheviks.

Meanwhile, the newly formed CEC of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets decided that it had to mitigate the hostility aroused by the cancellation of the 10 June demonstration and show the provincials that, contrary to appearances, the Menshevik- and SR-controlled Soviet did indeed have popular support among the Petrograd proletariat. To this end the CEC called a demonstration of its own for 18 June, under the slogan 'Peace without annexations and indemnities'. The crowd that turned out was massive, numbering an estimated 400,000. The Bolsheviks joined in, with the intention of demanding the transfer of power from the Coalition Government to the Soviet. They brought along the anti-war and anti-government placards and banners that they had prepared for the aborted 10 June demonstration. From their position on the reviewing stand on Petrograd's Champ de Mars, where the dead of the February Revolution had been entombed, Tseretelli, Chkheidze and other members of the CEC were appalled to find that slogans supporting the Coalition Government and the Soviet were vastly outnumbered by Bolshevik slogans. Column after column, representing districts, factories and regiments, proclaimed 'End the war' and 'Down with the ten capitalist-ministers'. In fact, hardly any of the slogans advanced by the Congress of Soviets were to be seen at all. The event was a fiasco for its initiators: to Sukhanov, 'it seemed that the Coalition [Government] was already formally liquidated and that Messrs. the Ministers, in view of the manifest popular mistrust, would quit their places that very day without waiting to be urged by more imposing means.'⁷

The Coalition Government, although greatly perturbed, was not cowed. For one thing, the demonstration occurred the day before the much-heralded military offensive was launched, and the Russian army, re-equipped by the Allies, was able to attack the feeble Austrian front lines in Galicia with initial success. Moreover, the government attacked the Durnovo villa on the same day, 19 June, recaptured it, and arrested everyone present. Combined with the launching of the offensive, this action electrified the garrison and the workers; there was much talk of an uprising against the government and of forcing the Soviet to take power, even against its wishes. No less provocatively, on 21 June the strongly pro-Bolshevik First Machine Gun Regiment was ordered to send about two-thirds of its men and 500 machine guns to the front. The machine-gunners, stationed in the Vyborg District, simply refused to obey the order and declared that it would decline to comply with all future troop levies until governmental power was transferred to the soviets.

Could the growing tension between the pro-Bolshevik troops and the government have led to a successful insurrection? The Bolshevik Military Organization was ready for an immediate uprising—as the All-Russian Conference of Bolshevik Military Organizations met in Petrograd on 16–23 June, one observer noted that the participants were filled with 'eagerness and the

strong desire for the final, great, tense battle. . . . Everywhere are heard the voices of comrade soldiers to the effect that the time for a decisive man-to-man fight for power has come.⁸ But the majority of the Bolshevik Central Committee, influenced by Lenin, still opposed a rising as premature and likely to fail, bringing about the collapse of the Revolution as a whole. M. Lashevich, a Bolshevik member of the Petrograd Soviet, denounced the Military Organization's drift toward 'adventurism' and called for restraint, remarking of his own comrades: 'it is impossible to make out where the Bolshevik ends and the Anarchist begins.'⁹

This time, however, the soldiers, especially the men of the First Machine Gun Regiment, were not to be restrained, least of all now that the Coalition Government was insisting that they furnish troops and machine guns for the front. Despite the Central Committee's injunction against a rising, the Military Organization supported the machine-gunners and other Petrograd troops slated for front-line duty. Militants on the Bolsheviks' Petersburg City Committee vehemently protested the Central Committee's efforts to contain the movement and resolved that the party should stand at the head of the insurrection.

Meanwhile on the Austrian front, the Russian troops were fighting only desultorily, often making only token attacks, sometimes even against empty trenches from which troops had been moved to the Western Front. Since the Austrians were even more demoralized than the Russians and were greatly outnumbered, the Russians easily broke through the front lines. But once German troops arrived to reinforce the Austrians, the Russians were driven back with little difficulty. As early as 24 June, Kerensky observed that 'units participating in the battle began drawing up resolutions with demands for immediate leave to the rear, so that only with difficulty was it possible to talk them into remaining in position and there was no possibility of moving them into the attack.'¹⁰ On 3 July the press reported that Russian forces were suffering heavy losses; indeed, as the Austro-German counter-offensive rolled back the army, Russian soldiers deserted the southwestern front *en masse*.

In Petrograd the machine-gunners met with an anarchist self-styled Provisional Revolutionary Committee and decided provocatively to demonstrate on 3 July, calling upon the garrison and the workers to join them. At seven p.m., after a day of intensive discussion and planning, trucks full of machine-gunners took their places in the streets, occupying key points in the capital and posting their guns on the approaches to the bridges that led to the city's center. The Moscow, 180th Reserve Infantry, Finlandsky, Grenadier, and Pavlovsky regiments and the Sixth Engineer Battalion joined them. Added to these troops were numerous workers from Petrograd's factories, but

significantly, several regiments that had mutinied in the February Revolution—most notably the Preobrazhensky, Semenovskiy and Izmailovskiy Guard regiments—either refused to support the machine-gunners or declared themselves neutral, a sign that an unknown number of the Petrograd garrison soldiers was unprepared to overthrow the government.

At eight p.m., led initially by the anarchist Provisional Revolutionary Committee, the demonstration got under way. Columns of workers and soldiers, fully armed, proceeded through the proletarian thoroughfares into the city center. Their first destination was the Kshesinskaya Mansion, the Bolshevik headquarters, where, according to *Izvestia*, 'parts of the First Machine-Gun, Moscow, and Grenadier regiments, in full fighting order, with red banners and signs ... call[ed] for the resignation of the bourgeois Ministers.'¹¹ They demanded that the Bolsheviks decide once and for all whether they would assume leadership of the demonstration.

Inside the palace, mayhem reigned. The Military Organization in particular argued in favor of leading the demonstration and a would-be coup against the Coalition Government. Conditions seemed favorable: a cabinet crisis was under way. The bourgeois Kadet ministers in the Coalition Government had quit because the government seemed too willing to accommodate the Ukraine's demands for autonomy. They were determined to prevent regional components of the empire from spinning off and even gaining new territory at the expense of the Austrian and Turkish empires. Russia, it was argued, had only one functional government: the newly formed CEC of the Congress of Soviets, which presumably spoke for the country's oppressed classes. If the Bolsheviks failed to take over the leadership of the demonstration, the Military Organization members contended, they would lose immense prestige among the masses.

Those who opposed taking over the leadership argued, however, that despite the instability of the Coalition Government, it was still capable of wielding enough force to suppress a Bolshevik-led insurrection, especially if the CEC backed its effort. Many troops in Petrograd, the more prudent leaders argued, were still loyal to the Soviet. And even the dispirited troops at the northern front were not likely to refuse to obey orders that came from the Petrograd Soviet. Finally, they warned, as the political composition of the Congress of Soviets revealed, the Bolsheviks still had only limited support in the country at large, particularly among the peasants, many of whom gave credence to the allegation that the Bolsheviks were, if not agents of the Germans, at least advocating a policy that the German war effort found desirable. Lenin reproved the Military Organization for the 'mess' it had helped to create and called for reining in any violent actions against the Coalition Government and the Soviet.

In the end the Bolsheviks, fully cognizant of the risks, decided to take responsibility for the demonstration but try to lead it in a peaceful direction. Thereafter the crowd dispersed, as *Izvestia* reported, some going 'to the Marinsky Palace [where the Coalition Government was located], still others to the Peter and Paul Fortress.'¹²

By midnight thousands of protesting troops and workers, urged on by the anarchists, were packed into the square before the Tauride Palace—the meeting place of the Soviet—and along its side streets, declaring that they would remain there until the Central Executive Committee of the Congress of Soviets took the power—which it adamantly refused to do! Two hours later about 30,000 Putilov workers joined the protesters. The armed crowd, by now numbering as many as 70,000, seemed on the verge of overwhelming the palace. The anarchists were eager to turn the demonstration into an insurrection, which most likely would ultimately have led to a massacre of workers not unlike that of May 1871 in Paris. Notwithstanding the anarchists' claims, however, 'spontaneity' was not enough: the demonstration remained formless and incoherent. The streets did not organize the demonstrators (contrary to the anarchists' expectations). After a war of words among the contending speakers, dawn broke, and the masses drifted back to their homes.

The next day began with a drizzle and a forecast of heavy rainfall, but the outpouring of workers and soldiers was massive nonetheless. A flotilla of some 10,000 Kronstadt sailors disembarked and tramped to the Kshinskaya Mansion, where they were greeted by Bolshevik orators. Once again the Bolshevik militants were filled with uncertainty. They called upon Lenin to address them, but he was reluctant to do so; he gave a brief speech that primarily appealed for self-restraint. This was not what the Kronstadters wanted to hear, and they received it with respectful coolness. As many as half a million demonstrators proceeded into the city center, where in some places provocateurs or police opened up volleys of rifle fire on the crowd from rooftops or upper-story windows, killing in all about 400.

The crowds finally converged on the Tauride Palace, where the Soviet was meeting, to demand that it transfer power from the government. Within its chambers the Menshevik and SR members of the Executive Committee ('Mamelukes', as Sukhanov called them) were busy denouncing the Bolsheviks; in the end they admitted only a five-member delegation to speak for the huge crowd outside, then patronizingly advised the delegation that their demands would be taken under advisement. Chernov was sent out to the Tauride's entrance to address the crowd—whereupon a group of enraged Kronstadt sailors seized the SR leader, apparently intending to lynch him. One furious sailor, shaking a clenched fist in Chernov's face, shouted, 'Why don't you take the power, you son-of-a-bitch, when we are giving it to you?' Trotsky,

who was particularly admired by the Kronstadters, calmed the sailors, who thereupon freed the SR leader without injury.

Unknown to the workers, soldiers and sailors outside, who were demanding that the Soviet take the power, the Soviet itself was making appeals to the commanders on the northern front to rescue it from its own supporters. The minister of justice, Pereverzev, moreover, had been circulating documents among the regiments purporting to prove that Lenin was a German agent and that the Bolsheviks were fomenting the uprising with a view toward establishing their own government. Apparently that was enough for the 'neutral' regiments to come to the rescue of the Soviet. Garbed in full battledress and armaments, with bands playing and feet tramping, the regiments arrived at the Tauride, only to find the square virtually empty. The troops were rewarded by the Soviet delegates with passionate embraces, while the demonstrators, weary of the entire farce, returned to their homes.

AFTERMATH OF THE JULY DAYS

Every uprising that is incomplete and fails to run its full course invariably induces a harsh counteraction. As a result of the July Days the nearly moribund Coalition Government, the Mamelukes in the Soviet, and the reactionary officer societies that had sprung up since February found themselves united against a common enemy: the Bolsheviks, and especially Lenin (the 'master spy'). The party was all but banned, the Kshinskaya Mansion was closed down, and Bolshevik militants were rounded up and imprisoned. An arrest order went out charging 21 Bolshevik leaders still at large with treason. The party's periodicals were suppressed, and the *Pravda* printing plant demolished.

— Lenin took refuge in the relative safety of Finland.

Nor did the government limit its repressive actions to the Bolsheviks alone.

- It ordered the workers to turn in their weapons (which only a few did). It
- issued a stern order forbidding land seizures by the peasants. Military units that had conspicuously participated in the July Days—notably the First Machine Gun, the 189th Infantry, and the Grenadier regiments—were sent to the front, where they helped spread the Bolshevik 'contagion' to the trenches. The government restored the death penalty for insubordination in the front lines and took other onerous measures to increase the authority of the officers over the troops.

The reaction intensified in the weeks that followed. Smears against the Bolsheviks, particularly Lenin, reached hysterical proportions, challenging the credulity of all but the most dyed-in-the-wool right-wingers. But it gradually

became clear to the public that the charges of Bolshevik collusion with German intelligence were doubtful. To be sure, the Bolsheviks, particularly Lenin, would have been willing to take money from any source—the Bolshevik leader had stated early in his revolutionary career that he would take funds even from the devil to overthrow the autocracy—and the Germans, who detested the Bolsheviks, may have channelled some funds to them through a Scandinavian route. But this hardly made internationalists such as Lenin and his comrades into mere agents of the German government. No group in the Russian revolutionary movement outdid the Bolsheviks in declaring their solidarity with the German proletariat and in propagandizing German soldiers against their officers and the Kaiser's regime. Moreover, the attacks upon the Bolsheviks soon turned against their originators. Thereafter the Bolsheviks were able to recover from the denunciations leveled against them. They found good allies in the Left SRs, who were programmatically, albeit not theoretically, in agreement with their policies.

Meanwhile the offensive assumed farcical proportions. At the front the troops were so disaffected by the hopeless military operation that they finally refused to fight except to protect their lives. Once the Austrians, reinforced by German reserves, went on the counter-offensive and drove them back, the Russians' defections became massive. On 21 August, in fact, German troops entered the strategic seaport of Riga, placing themselves within easy striking distance of Petrograd and pushing the Eastern Front appreciably into the Russian heartland. The failure of the offensive, together with the existence of near-famine conditions in the cities, severely eroded the authority of the Kerensky regime and the Petrograd Soviet, and fears that Kerensky was tilting toward a dictatorship greatly enhanced the standing of the Bolsheviks. Within little more than ten weeks the Bolsheviks transformed themselves from a fugitive party into one that was ascendant in the cities of European Russia and in the army on the Eastern Front.

PEASANT JACQUERIES AND SOLDIER MUTINIES

In the early autumn of 1917 the morale of the Russian people had sunk to a new nadir. Prices soared in the cities, food was scarce, queues before bakeries and other shops grew ever longer and angrier, and the war's end seemed nowhere in sight. None of the compelling social problems that troubled the people was being resolved; nor did the government show any signs of working toward their solution. On the contrary, the Coalition Government seemed to distance itself symbolically from the restive masses by moving its headquarters

from the Maryinsky Palace to the former seat of tsarist power, the posh and ornate Winter Palace itself. The Petrograd Soviet, in turn, shifted its offices and meeting place from the Tauride Palace to the more humble Smolny Institute, a former girls' boarding school, located far to the east of the city center, near the Neva River.

The vast network of revolutionary and potentially revolutionary committees that existed in the army, the factories, and the countryside showed no signs of weakening. The increasingly militant peasantry kept seizing land and restoring it to the communal tenure of the *obshchina*. In March only 34 counties had reported peasant land seizures. In April the figure escalated to 174, then to 256 in May, 280 in June, and 325 in July. 'These figures, however, do not give a complete picture of the actual growth of the movement,' observes Trotsky, 'because in each county the struggle assumed from month to month a more and more stubborn and broad mass character.'¹³

The only group with any political influence in the countryside—and hence with a mass base outside the cities—were the Socialist Revolutionaries. Accordingly it became fashionable and necessary for government officials who wished to exercise any popular influence to designate themselves as SRs. Even Kerensky, who tried to postpone land reform to the forthcoming constituent assembly, designated himself a moderate Socialist Revolutionary. Such adhesions so diluted the party program that they made the SR label all but meaningless. Meanwhile, the efforts of authentic SR ministers like Chernov to achieve land redistribution were stymied by the patina the party had acquired as a member of the ruling coalition, which included the Kadets, who in turn threatened to withdraw from any government that rejected private property rights. Revolutionary SRs who remained true to the party's long-standing program no longer felt at home within its ranks and in growing numbers began to consolidate a faction known as the Left Socialist Revolutionaries (Left SRs).

By the end of July, peasant soviets had emerged in 52 of Russia's 78 provinces and in 371 of its 813 districts. In the late summer of 1917, village assemblies and district land committees were nearly indistinguishable from rural soviets. Indeed, land redistribution began to top the agenda of district and provincial congresses in rural areas. The frightened gentry insistently demanded that the Coalition Government take action against the rebellious peasantry, and in July the interior minister ordered local officials to prosecute all land seizures. The arrests, in turn, served not to intimidate the peasants but to incense them. The Executive Committee of the Soviet of Peasants' Deputies, reflecting the angry mood of the countryside, denounced the aggressive behavior of the ministry as a 'counter-revolutionary offensive', all but validating peasant resistance. Peasants clashed with police. Soldiers on leave and deserters, who had been propagandized by both the Bolsheviks and the

emerging Left SRs, assisted the militant leaders in fighting off government attempts to protect estate owners.

By late summer, the peasant movement was assuming all the characteristics of an outright *jacquerie*. Organized peasant bands, discarding their traditional humility, murdered gentry and pillaged and burned their manors. In earlier months of the Revolution such acts had been few; but in September they reached epidemic proportions. Even well-to-do peasants were being reduced to the level of their fellow villagers. A vast transformation of Russian agriculture was taking place on a scale that had not been seen in centuries. The egalitarian peasant ideal of freedom, *volya*, seemed on the brink of becoming a reality.

In the meantime the army was steadily decomposing into a ragged mass of ill-fed, ill-clothed, and aimless beggars with rifles. Frontline troops and reserves alike did not hesitate to treat their military superiors with belligerency. As William Henry Chamberlin notes in his classic history of the Revolution, 'the practise of throwing bombs and grenades into officers' quarters ... became a very popular sport during the last weeks of the Provisional [Coalition] Government.'¹⁴ The army was on the point of erupting into another full-scale mutiny. Although the government tried to bolster the authority of the officers over the troops by giving them new powers, the officers were afraid to exercise those powers; in many cases they joined the ranks of the deserters, leaving the command of their military units to committees or to radicalized junior officers.

THE KORNILOV REVOLT

The widespread social breakdown in Russia was matched by the breakdown of the government's authority. On 3 July, after failing to get their way on the question of autonomy for the Ukraine, the three Kadet ministers resigned. A few days later Prince Lvov followed them and surrendered his office as prime minister. For three long weeks thereafter Russia had no functioning government. Finally, on 24 July, a Second Coalition Government was formed, heralding itself as a 'government of salvation of the revolution' and claiming wide plenary powers. It was this coalition that was signally identified with one man, Alexander Kerensky, who became prime minister while still remaining minister of the army and navy. In appointing all the other ministers, he gave a slight concession to the socialists (eight, as against seven liberals); the Kadets, in turn, agreed to participate in the coalition only on condition that the socialist ministers were no longer answerable to the Soviet or even to their own parties. Astonishingly, the socialist ministers duly accepted the Kadet terms and

entered the government of 'Comrade Kerensky', as the Mensheviks and SRs ironically called the prime minister. The PSR chief Chernov, who had resigned as minister of agriculture on 20 July, returned to the government for a third time on the insistence of the CEC of the Congress of Soviets, which wanted to keep an eye on Kerensky's doings.

The bourgeoisie, represented by the Kadets, did not take the Second Coalition seriously. Feelings ran high among the upper classes that only a military dictator could save Russia from the revolutionary Left; they were patently eager for a counter-revolutionary man on horseback to clean out the Augean stables of the Revolution and eliminate all its detestable committees, soviets, militias, and left-wing socialists, to restore law and order, and to mobilize the defense of the motherland against the Central Powers. But who would the man on horseback be? He was already eagerly waiting in the wings: General Lavr Kornilov, the self-described 'son of a peasant Cossack' who had grossly mismanaged his command of the recent Galician offensive. On 18 July, Kerensky appointed him commander-in-chief of the army. Doubtless some kind of understanding existed between the two men. Kerensky seemed to entertain the fantasy that he could control Kornilov, who in turn began mobilizing hand-picked forces for a march on Petrograd that would install him in power—and dispose not only of the soviets but of the Kerensky government as well.

To legitimize the Second Coalition Government and to consolidate his base among the respectable classes, Kerensky and his supporters assembled a State Conference, to be held on 12 August, composed, as he put it, of 'all responsible organizations, State Dumas, and municipalities.' The choice of Moscow over Petrograd as the conference's venue was not arbitrary: the government expected fewer workers and soldiers to demonstrate against its authority. The Bolsheviks, who were not permitted to participate, responded to their exclusion by organizing a general strike in the old capital on the opening day of the conference. Of the 2500 delegates who showed up at the Bolshoi Theater for the conference, possibly half were wealthy industrialists and financiers, military men, landowning monarchists, and Duma bureaucrats. Only about 500 came from various dumas; 313 from cooperatives; a mere 330 from soviets; and 176 from trade unions.

Far from unifying the country, the conference merely exposed its cleavages. In all it was a fiasco for Kerensky. One speaker after another condemned in varying degrees the changes wrought by the February Revolution, much to the enthusiasm of the right-wing participants. Even the aging 'father of anarchist-communism', Peter Kropotkin, who zealously supported the Allied war effort, denounced the Zimmerwaldians, to the enthusiastic applause of the Right. Kornilov unexpectedly put in an appearance, to the wild cheers of the Right. The 'son of a simple Cossack peasant' was becoming the darling not only of

reactionary Cossack officers but of conservative Kadets and wealthy patricians and industrialists, who eagerly plowed funds into his movement for an authoritarian government. The old tsarist political spectrum had shifted radically to the right.

The prime minister, by contrast, came off as a dishrag. Kerensky was no less eager than Kornilov to eliminate the Petrograd Left, including the Soviet, but he was unprepared to leave the scene to Kornilov. Each of the two men apparently considered himself to be the strongman to whom the other had to accede. For two weeks Kerensky and Kornilov had been positioning themselves on how to divide the power. It was only at the very last moment, on 25 August, that Kerensky realized that Kornilov intended to eliminate the Second Coalition Government, Kerensky included, and assume power for himself.

No sooner was the conference over than, to widespread public astonishment, the prime minister peremptorily dismissed Kornilov as commander-in-chief. But the resolute Cossack general simply ignored Kerensky's dismissal order (absurdly declaring that the prime minister had acted 'under the pressure of the Bolshevik majority of the Soviets' and accusing Kerensky of acting 'in full agreement with the plans of the German general staff'¹⁵). On 26 August, on the eve of the six-month anniversary of the February Revolution, Kornilov began to move troops toward Petrograd, ostensibly to forestall a Bolshevik plot from using the celebration to take over the government. The man on horseback would then use this trumped-up excuse to establish a military dictatorship. The bourgeoisie was ecstatic; the Kadet ministers obligingly resigned from the coalition, to destabilize the government and ease Kornilov's ascent to power. Ironically, Kerensky was left with a government composed mainly of socialists.

Kornilov's troops were highly select forces who were believed to be the most reliable in the Russian army. They included the 'Savage Division', made up of Caucasian mountain tribesmen well known for their ferocity in battle, as well as reactionary Cossack units. Kornilovite generals pledged entire divisions—which they barely controlled—to aid in the coup. Their initial movement toward Petrograd produced panic within the government and the Soviet leadership. But it aroused the fighting spirit of Petrograd to an extent that the capital had not seen since February. Every political organization to the left of the Kadets—labor organizations, soviets, revolutionary committees, and the like—rallied unhesitatingly to the defense of the city and the Revolution. The CEC pledged full support for Kerensky and even voted to allow him to form whatever government he chose as an alternative, as long as he actively fought Kornilov's coup attempt. The Bolshevik Party, whose enormous influence among the Petrograd workers could no longer be ignored, was restored to legality, and its members arrested after the July Days were freed. All the

socialist parties, together with numerous soviet executive committees—including that of the Congress of Soviets of Peasant Deputies—joined together to constitute a Committee for Struggle with Counter-revolution, which resolutely went about mobilizing Petrograd and its environs against the mailed fist of military counter-revolution.

The backbone of the city's defense consisted of the local soviets—especially district soviets and various naval soviets—which quickly formed a multitude of revolutionary committees—more than 240 on the night of 27–28 August alone. The initiative that these secondary soviets took in organizing the opposition to the military coup cannot be overstated. At a meeting of their Interdistrict Conference on 28 August, they laid out the following plan of action:

[T]he assembled district soviet representatives voted to delegate a representative to the Committee for Struggle and to each of its sections, to remain in permanent session, to take the lead in organizing an armed workers' militia under the political responsibility of the Interdistrict Conference and district soviets, to impose control by district soviets over the actions of local government commissars, to send out roving patrols charged with detaining counterrevolutionary agitators, and to establish close contact between soviets and dumas in all districts. These were not mere statements of intent: the Interdistrict Conference at once dispatched to all district soviets in and around Petrograd specific directives relating to the recruitment, organization, and arming of a workers' militia. For the duration of the Kornilov emergency, the Interdistrict Conference's offices at Smolny and the headquarters of each district soviet became directing centers for the preservation of revolutionary order and for mass action against the counterrevolution.¹⁶

On 28–29 August, the soviets began to train workers to form a 'Red Guard' that soon numbered some 25,000 fighting men. The Bolsheviks, in effect, now had their own proletarian army, equipped not only with rifles but also with machine guns and carefully structured around the command of class-conscious revolutionary leaders. By contrast, the 'Savage Division', upon which Kornilov placed so many of his hopes, consisted of a mere 1300 horsemen, and even that small complement was 600 rifles short. Despite their reputation for ferocity, their morale was no higher than that of the rest of the Russian troops. As the trains bearing the Caucasian regiments neared Tsarskoe Selo and the capital, they encountered a multitude of obstructions created by railroad workers, who had torn up some tracks and blocked others with lumber-filled railroad cars. Telegraphers, in turn, prevented Kornilov's forces

from communicating with either their officers or even Kornilov personally, whom illness had obliged to remain at supreme military headquarters at Moghilev.

As it happened, many of Kornilov's troops had not been informed of the purpose of their deployment and had no idea what they would do when they occupied Petrograd. While they were idled along the tracks, a Caucasian-speaking delegation from the Soviet fraternized with the division and informed them of the aim of their mission. The Caucasians were easily persuaded to disobey their orders and even formed a committee to prevent any further movement toward Petrograd. The Cossack units, most of which were demoralized by the war and by their unsavory role as the policemen of reaction, were turned against the Kornilov coup and refused to march on the capital.

The Kornilov affair thus ended pitifully, without a shot being fired or a blow being struck on the general's behalf. It fell apart primarily as a result of actions by railroad workers and a handful of agitators. Even if the troops had reached the capital and attempted to take it, they almost certainly would have been defeated by the thousands of armed workers and garrisoned soldiers who were mobilized against them. Kornilov himself surrendered on 1 September and was duly imprisoned. Right-wing politicians and officers who had supported him were arrested, and pro-Kornilov groups were immediately disbanded.

KERENSKY IN POWER

The Kornilov plot served not only to expose the weakness of the counter-revolutionary forces but to restore the resolute Bolsheviks as a major force in the Revolution, even adding to their prestige among the masses.

Following Kornilov's surrender, Kerensky, filled with hubris, struck the pose of a revolutionary Napoleon, naming himself commander-in-chief of the army. Inasmuch as the Kadets had resigned from the Second Coalition Government, it was necessary to form a third one. But should the Kadets be included in the new coalition? They had supported Kornilov's plot, which in itself seemed to exclude them; and they were also the principal bourgeois party in Russia in what was a nominally bourgeois revolution. The perplexing question proved to be intractable, and on 1 September Kerensky named a five-man inner cabinet or Directory (a name redolent of the 1795-9 French government), to exercise plenary powers as an interim government. The Directory's members included Tereschenko, a right-wing Social Democrat; Nikitin, a Menshevik who had already been interior minister; and two military officers,

one of whom had to be released from prison to occupy his new position. On the same day, in accordance with a long-standing popular demand, Kerensky finally—and belatedly—proclaimed Russia a republic.

These changes satisfied no one. Two days after the formation of the Directory, the executive committees of the Petrograd Soviet and the All-Russian Congress of Peasants' Deputies issued a call for a Democratic Conference to counter the Directory and oppose participation of the Kadets in any new government. The Democratic Conference consisted mainly of representatives of soviets, trade unions, peasant cooperatives, village committees, the socialist parties, and other left-oriented bodies. Unlike the State Conference, the Democratic Conference convened in Petrograd in order to 'subject the government to some sort of improvised representative institution until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly,' as Trotsky put it—in effect, 'to bridle the too eager Kerensky.'¹⁷ Against Kerensky's Bonaparte, the Democratic Conference was prepared to play the role of the revolutionary Convention.

The Democratic Conference's 1200 participants, who met from 14–22 September, oscillated wildly on the question of a bourgeois coalition government. First they voted (766–688) in favor of a coalition; then they voted (595–493) to exclude the Kadets. Inasmuch as the Kadets were the only major bourgeois party in Russia, the vote was a political absurdity. Thereafter the conference voted *against* any bourgeois coalition at all (813–183) but left it to the party leaders to negotiate the details of forming a new, presumably socialist government. Ever resourceful, the leaders devised an inane compromise favoring a bourgeois coalition but making no reference to the Kadets (which passed 829–106). The effect of these vacillations was to open the way to yet another ignominious bourgeois-socialist coalition government.

Out of this confusion a Third Coalition Government was officially formed, consisting of three right-wing SRs, three Mensheviks, six unaffiliated members—and four Kadets! On 19 September, the Democratic Conference—with the agreement of the new government—also created a Provisional Council of the Republic, or 'Pre-Parliament', to function as a preliminary parliamentary body—a legislature with Kerensky's cabinet as an executive—pending the convocation of the Constituent Assembly (which was now scheduled for sometime in November). About 300 of the Pre-Parliament's representatives came from the groups that participated in the Democratic Conference (including delegates of the CEC, the executive committees of regional soviets, and the executive committee of the Congress of Peasants' Deputies), while about 150 were non-socialists, including various barely functional bourgeois groupings.

Negotiations for the Third Coalition Government took place on 22–24 September. The Kadets, realizing that after Kornilov there would be no more

men on horseback, entered the cabinet, together with the socialists. But they agreed to return only on one condition: the new cabinet must be independent of the Pre-Parliament, not accountable to it—which meant that the Pre-Parliament would be merely an advisory body. Incredibly, the other parties agreed, and on 25 September Kerensky announced the formation of the Pre-Parliament and the Third Coalition Government. Utterly disgusted, the newly radicalized Petrograd Soviet denounced the government and refused to give it any support, declaring ominously that the coming Congress of Soviets would soon create 'a truly revolutionary government'.

Their pronouncements sounded like the death rattle of a doomed regime. Far from unifying Russia, they reflected the country's sharp polarization. First a monarchy had been exhausted by three years of war and a revolution; then the dream of a man on horseback had been dispelled; and now even the prospect of a Convention followed by a Bonaparte seemed to be receding into the horizon. Taken together, this series of governmental failures had cleared the way for a takeover by a resolute Left that promised to remove Russia from the war, distribute land to the peasants, and create a new institutional democracy—namely the Bolshevik Party and its supporters.

NOTES

1. Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia: A History and an Interpretation* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 2:1396; 'Call by the Petrograd Soviet to the Peoples of the World' (Mar. 27 [14], 1917), in *Documents of Russian History: 1914–1917*, ed. Frank Alfred Golder, trans. Emanuel Aronsberg (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), pp. 325–9. The rejection of 'the policy of conquest' was later (Apr. 11) amended to read 'a general renunciation of annexation and indemnity.'
2. 'The Provisional Government and War Aims' (Apr. 10 [Mar. 29], 1917), in *Documents*, p. 330.
3. 'Miliukov's Note on War Aims' (May 1 [Apr. 18], 1917), in *Documents*, p. 334, emphasis added.
4. Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), pp. 44–5.
5. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1932), p. 1:431.
6. Quoted in Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution*, p. 81.
7. N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 417.
8. Quoted in Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution*, p. 113.
9. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 129.
10. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 110.
11. 'The "Izvestia's" Account of the Uprising (Jul. 3, 1917),' in *Documents*, p. 445.
12. *Izvestia*, Jul. 3, 1917, in *Documents*, p. 145.

13. Trotsky, *History*, p. 1:403.
14. William Henry Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1935), p. 1:237.
15. Quoted in Florinsky, *Russia*, p. 1439.
16. Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1978), pp. 139–40.
17. Trotsky, *History*, p. 2:328.

CHAPTER 48 The October Revolution

BOLSHEVIKS AND LEFT SRs

From his hiding place in Finland, Lenin watched the events unfolding in Petrograd and elsewhere with growing anxiety. Could the Bolsheviks gain a majority of delegates at the coming Second Congress of Soviets? He was aware that the Left SRs, the growing left wing within the PSR, had split decisively from Chernov's party and formed the Party of Left Socialist Revolutionaries. Led by Boris Kamkov, Vladimir A. Karelin, and Maria Spiridonova, the Left SRs repudiated all collaboration with the Kerensky government and adopted a *narodnik* program of land redistribution, coupled with a demand for peace similar to that of the Bolsheviks. Almost inevitably the two parties became allies, and in September the Left SRs became an indispensable factor in shifting control of the Petrograd Soviet to the Bolsheviks.

As isolated as he was, Lenin wrote prolifically, completing not only *The State and Revolution* but many shorter polemical pieces as well. In 'The Tasks of the Revolution', probably written on 6 September, he revived his pre-July support for the revolutionary role of the soviets, readopting the slogan 'All power to the soviets!' Instead of a parliament, Lenin argued, the soviets alone could provide a framework for a new government. In another article a few days later he explained that he had made the change because soviets were democratic in nature:

'Power to the soviets' means radically reshaping the entire old state apparatus, that bureaucratic apparatus which hampers everything democratic. It means removing this apparatus and substituting for it a new popular one, i.e., a truly democratic apparatus of soviets, i.e., the organized and armed majority of the people—the workers, soldiers, and peasants. It means allowing the majority of the people initiative and independence not only in

the election of deputies but also in state administration, in effecting reforms and various other changes.¹

Lenin's faith in democracy, as we have seen, was minimal, but the masses at this time were highly supportive of the soviets—and of the Bolsheviks as well. By September Petrograd, as William Henry Chamberlin remarks, had become 'a seething caldron of Bolshevik agitation.'² The factory committees were already resolute supporters of the Bolsheviks. On August 31 the Petrograd Soviet, its Soldiers' Section (now controlled by Left SRs) as well as its Workers' Section, voted to support the Bolsheviks' call for soviet power to replace the existing coalition government, their demand for immediate peace, and their Left SR-inspired program for an immediate land redistribution. The Bolsheviks now became the majority party within the Petrograd Soviet. On 7 September, after the Soviet reaffirmed its allegiance to the Bolshevik program, it elected a new Executive Committee, which was not only Bolshevik-controlled but chaired by the dynamic Trotsky, who took office on 25 September. Under his leadership the Soviet voted to refuse to recognize Kerensky's new Third Coalition Government (which was announced on the same day) and openly called upon the masses to seize power through the soviets.

From Petrograd, Bolshevik influence was spreading to Russia's other industrial cities. In soviet after soviet the party gained majority votes. On 5 September the Moscow Soviet passed its first pro-Bolshevik resolution, reflecting a Bolshevik majority, and two weeks later elected a new executive committee with a Bolshevik majority. Between 9–17 September the Third Regional Congress of the Soviets of the Army, Fleet, and Workers, meeting in Helsinki, Finland, voted to support Bolshevik resolutions by large majorities and elected a regional executive committee composed almost entirely of Bolsheviks and Left SRs. Social upheaval in the countryside was reaching fever pitch, opening new doors for the Bolsheviks and especially the Left SRs in rural areas. In contrast to the July Days, when the rest of the country was not yet in step with Petrograd, most of the provinces now seemed likely to support a Bolshevik seizure of power—or at least not oppose it.

Without the support of the soviets, no coalition government could hope to survive—and the soviets were passing into increasingly radical hands. Even in some of the most remote cities, citizens, voting under conditions of universal suffrage, approved ballot items that rejected the Third Coalition Government and called for the transfer of power to the soviets. Histories of the period seldom mention that the Bolsheviks and Left SRs made substantial gains not only in the proletarian soviets but in the traditionally middle-class municipal dumas as well. On 24 September they even swept the vote for members of the Moscow Duma; their showing dwarfed that of the Kadets and SRs, who had

once enjoyed large majorities there. By October the Mensheviks and SRs held a dominant position only on the CEC of the Congress of Soviets, and even that fragile hold was endangered when the CEC voted to endorse Kerensky's new government.

By late September disorganization and mutiny were rife in the army, throwing the forces of the counter-revolution into pell-mell retreat. An unprecedented revolutionary situation had developed in Russia. Power was all but lying in the streets; seldom could an avowed revolutionary party hope to find itself so strategically placed to pick it up as was the Bolshevik Party. At this precarious moment lack of leadership could easily reverse the movement of the Revolution and instead plunge Russia into a counter-revolution that would erase all the gains the masses had made over the past year. No one understood the need for haste better than Lenin, who frantically urged his party's Central Committee to take power lest the 'impending surrender of Petrograd' to the German army by 'Kerensky and Co.' make 'our chances a hundred times less favorable.'

That Kerensky might prefer German occupation to a seizure of power by the Bolsheviks and Left SRs was by no means idle speculation. Had not Rodzianko, the former Duma president, in a well-publicized speech, recently expressed satisfaction that Petrograd was in military danger? If the Germans captured the city, he had declared, they would destroy all the central soviet organizations. 'I should be glad if these institutions were destroyed,' he admitted, 'because they have brought Russia nothing but grief.'¹³

On 12 September, in a letter to the Petersburg and Moscow City Committees titled 'The Bolsheviks Must Assume Power', Lenin insisted that the time had finally come for the Bolsheviks to prepare for an armed seizure of power: 'Having obtained a majority in the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies of both capitals [Petrograd and Moscow], the Bolsheviks can, and *must*, take over the power of government.'¹⁴ Repeating Marx's injunction that 'insurrection is an art!' he closed his impassioned letter by affirming, 'Power must be assumed in Moscow and in Petrograd *at once* (it does not matter which begins, even Moscow may begin); we shall win *absolutely and unquestionably*.'¹⁵

This letter, as well as another that followed two days later, threw the Central Committee and the Petersburg and Moscow city committees into turmoil. Meeting jointly on the evening of the 15 September to discuss their contents, they rejected his advice unanimously and even voted to burn these compromising documents—save for one copy to keep for the party's archives. The Bolshevik committees were at this time advocating a policy of conciliation toward the SRs and Mensheviks, proposing that all three parties form a joint socialist government and occupy the Soviet's Executive Committee. Indeed, they would be accountable to the soviets, where the Bolsheviks would play a loyal oppositional role.

200
debates

In mid-September a continuing stream of letters and articles was flowing from Lenin in Finland to the Bolsheviks in Petrograd, urgently demanding that the party leadership plan for an immediate armed seizure of power. Hardly any member of the Central Committee responded favorably to Lenin's demand. Kamenev and a large majority of the Central Committee had been chastened by the repression of the party during the July Days and feared the prospect of isolation, repression, and civil war, followed by the establishment of a reactionary regime. The dominant tone in the Central Committee was clearly set by Kamenev, who repeatedly advocated moderation and compromise. Even Bolshevik leaders who accepted Lenin's views in principle did not propose to proceed immediately toward an insurrection. They were convinced that they must wait to gain legitimization from the Congress of Soviets, whose next meeting was to begin several weeks later, on 20 October.

This stalling tactic threw Lenin into a rage. He shot back that 20 October would be too late; such a delay would give Kerensky time to mobilize forces to quash the insurrection. Insistently he demanded that the Bolsheviks take power now, *before* the convocation of the Soviet Congress, in order to present it with a *fait accompli*. Any failure to act now, he admonished the Central Committee, would constitute nothing less than treachery to the international proletarian revolution. Again, however, the Central Committee rejected his demand. On 17 September, his frustration reached a point of such despair that, at some risk to his life, he moved from Helsinki to Vyborg, a town near the Russian frontier (not to be confused with Petrograd's Vyborg District), which placed him precariously within the government's easy reach. Writing from his new location on 29 September, he went as far as to 'tender my resignation from the Central Committee, which I hereby do, reserving for myself freedom to campaign among the *rank and file* of the Party and at the Party Congress.'⁶ (Lenin plainly understood that he had substantial support in the lower party bodies, especially in the Central Soviet of Factory Shop Committees.) But again the Central Committee ignored his resignation letter—as did Lenin himself, who continued to send messages to the committee as if he had never resigned from it.

THE MAKING OF AN INSURRECTION

The ostensibly centralized, disciplined organization of 'professional revolutionaries' that Lenin had worked so hard to fashion had now successfully blocked him for weeks. Finally, on 7 October, he took the enormous risk of

moving into an apartment in the northernmost part of the Vyborg District itself. His new domicile belonged to a trusted comrade, Margarita Fofanova. On 10 October, for the first time in weeks, he met personally with the Central Committee definitively to resolve if and when an insurrection would occur. Slightly more than half of the 21 Central Committee members attended the meeting, gathering of all places in the apartment of Sukhanov, whose wife, a Bolshevik, had persuaded her unwitting Menshevik husband to absent himself.

Lenin
returns

In a passionate hour-long address to the committee, Lenin again made his case for an immediate uprising. The majority of workers and soldiers supported the Bolsheviks, he admonished, then warned that Kerensky was about to surrender Petrograd to the Germans. The committee, he insisted, must get to work without delay to make the logistical plans for the uprising and decide how and when to eliminate the existing government. The discussion that followed was impassioned. Kamenev and Zinoviev, undoubtedly thinking of the July Days, maintained that most of Russia was not committed to the Bolsheviks; indeed, they argued, the workers wanted to make a revolution through the Constituent Assembly, while the peasantry had yet to be persuaded that the new government should be overthrown.

Lenin thereupon penciled a resolution calling upon all party organizations to prepare for an insurrection—a 'coming out', in the language of the time—which the committee adopted by a 10-to-2 vote, with Kamenev and Zinoviev alone dissenting. But the resolution was a cautious one: it set no specific date for the insurrection and established no practical machinery for its execution. It most resembled a statement of intention. Thus even as Lenin successfully obtained the vote he wanted in principle, the uneasy Central Committee continued to leave room for procrastination.

A flurry of local and regional meetings filled the following week. The Bolsheviks expressly agitated for power to be transferred to the soviets—not necessarily as the result of an insurrection, they averred, but under the auspices of the forthcoming Congress of Soviets. On 15 October, at a meeting of the Petersburg Committee, the Bolshevik district leaders reported that while the city's workers and soldiers supported the Bolshevik program and the transfer of power to the soviets in principle, they were not prepared to carry out an immediate insurrection. One leader after another advised that the workers had already lost too much pay and feared the prospect of imprisonment, transfer to the front, or even execution if the uprising failed, as it had in July. The Congress of Soviets (whose meeting was rescheduled to 25 October), they believed, was the appropriate body to settle the issue of Russia's future government. Meanwhile the Bolsheviks created no insurrectionary organs. The Red Guard units languished in disarray; arms and ammunition remained in short supply; no drills of insurrectionary workers were occurring; and no effort

was made to call upon the rail workers to keep the lines intact after the uprising.

Given these difficulties, the Central Committee met on the night of 16–17 October to reconsider its 10 October resolution. Kamenev and Zinoviev firmly insisted that the necessary conditions to call for a rising did not exist—if only because the Bolsheviks were unprepared! Lenin, however, adamantly refused to back down. An immediate insurrection, he argued, would re-energize the workers. At length the Bolshevik leader asked for a new vote on the resolution, and the committee reconfirmed the insurrection by a vote of 17 to 2, with 4 abstentions. This resolution too failed to specify a date for the uprising.

At the end of the meeting, Kamenev resigned from the Central Committee and, for all practical purposes, moved into public opposition to its decision. On 18 October his statement opposing the Central Committee's decision to stage a 'coming out' was published in Gorky's periodical, *Novaya Zhizn'*. By allowing his statement to be published, Kamenev revealed his party's insurrectionary intentions to the general public, a gesture that could have led to the arrest of all Bolsheviks on charges of conspiracy to commit treason.

Although Lenin wrote a reply to Zinoviev's article, on 19 October the Bolshevik leader himself seems to have become despondent. As Robert V. Daniels observes:

By all appearances Lenin had lost hope that an insurrection could still be launched before the [Second] Congress of Soviets. . . . He did not leave the Fofanova apartment after the 17th; as far as the record shows, none of the Central Committee came to see him after Trotsky's reported visit on the 18th. Feeling politically and physically isolated, Lenin seems to have lapsed into a state of a real depression. He was not to be heard from again until the revolution was actually under way.⁷

The 'supreme' leader of this ostensibly centralized party was being bypassed and ignored in the course of his party's greatest single historical action. His supposed followers were putting their energy, not into preparing for an uprising, but into preparing to persuade the upcoming Congress to replace the Third Coalition Government with a soviet regime.

Trotsky too seems to have resisted Lenin's pressure for an immediate insurrection, as his history of the revolution makes fairly evident; rather, he took the position that galvanizing the workers, the Red Guards, and the garrison into 'coming out' would require a serious provocation by the government; the insurrection was likely to gain more support if it was dressed as a defensive measure against government belligerency. Almost as if following Trotsky's script, Kerensky inadvertently provided the Bolsheviks with precisely

the provocation they needed. During the first week of October the German forces occupying Riga had seized two islands in the Gulf of Riga and driven off Russia's Baltic fleet. With characteristic oafishness, the prime minister thereupon blamed this military fiasco, which cut Petrograd off from the Baltic Sea, on the Baltic sailors, many of whom were known to be Bolshevik supporters. Using this defeat as an opportunity to rid Petrograd of the garrison's politically unreliable members, Kerensky on 5 October ordered that most of the government's military opponents be moved to the front.

The garrison's reaction was fierce. Already depleted by the August advance of the Germans, the soldiers saw the move as evidence of treachery on the part of Kerensky, who appeared to be planning to leave Petrograd defenseless before a new German advance. Speaking in one voice, the garrison abjured all support for the government and demanded that power be shifted to the soviets. Bolshevik agitators, particularly Trotsky, made the most of the situation, denouncing the government to cheering crowds of soldiers and sailors and winning most of the troops to the Bolshevik agenda. The Red Guards reassembled and began to drill assiduously, while various army units openly pledged to 'come out' in the event of a government crackdown. Perhaps most indicative of the garrison's mood, many Cossack units pledged to remain neutral in the event of a rising.

Meanwhile on 9 October, at the Petrograd Soviet, a stormy plenary session adopted a resolution, formulated by Trotsky, that authorized the formation of a 'revolutionary committee of defense' to resist the government's effort to transfer garrison troops to the front. The resolution cast the situation as a crisis comparable to the Kornilov revolt: the new committee was to arm the workers and co-ordinate military action to defend 'the people from the attack which is openly being prepared by military and civilian Kornilovites'⁸—a phrase that unmistakably referred to Kerensky, the government, and the army command.

The Left SR Soviet deputy Pavel Lazimir was placed in command of what, three days later, was renamed the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC). Although the MRC's original function was not overtly to overthrow the government or seize power, during the next weeks this historic committee would guide the Bolshevik insurrection. Its leading Bureau, chosen on 20 October, was composed of Lazimir; Andrei Sadovsky, the Bolshevik chairman of the Soldiers' Section of the Soviet; and Vladimir Antonov-Ovseyenko and Nikolai Podvoisky, two Bolsheviks who belonged to the party's Military Organization. On 21 October a conference of the Petrograd garrison gave its final approval to the formation of the MRC and repudiated the government's control over the troops in the city. In effect, the garrison had declared war against the government, in what a number of historians regard as the actual beginning of the October Revolution.

By ordering a large part of the Petrograd garrison to the front, Kerensky had cocked the insurrectionary pistol that was aimed at his own head. He now proceeded to pull the trigger by attempting to suppress the city's extreme Left. Among other things, he ordered that the Bolshevik press be shut down. Early on 24 October a detachment of young officer cadets arrived at the Bolshevik printing plant, closed it, and confiscated all copies of its paper, *Rabochy Put*. In response, at nine o'clock the MRC Bureau dispatched a machine-gun company to reopen the plant; at eleven the Bureau proclaimed that the capital faced a 'Kornilovite plot' and alerted all troops and Red Guards to prepare for battle. Kerensky, in turn, ordered the deployment of troops that he hoped were loyal to the government to go from the front to Petrograd. His principal supporters within the city—the officer cadets and several Cossack units—sent patrols into the streets and reinforced the Winter Palace. By early afternoon the cadets had raised some of the drawbridges over the Neva to secure the city's center and cut the telephone and electric lines at the Smolny Institute, the Petrograd Soviet's and the Bolsheviks' headquarters.

Although the MRC Bureau members pored over maps, issued orders, and co-ordinated the deployment of troops, Red Guards, Kronstadt sailors, and commissars, its tactics were surprisingly defensive. For most of the 24th it sent out armed detachments simply to undo measures that the government had already undertaken, such as reopening the Bolshevik printing plant, lowering the drawbridges, and repairing the telephone and electric lines. The workers remained in their factories during the day, as though no insurrection were under way, and the streets were empty of demonstrators. Not until five p.m. did the MRC order the seizure of the telegraph office, and not until eight did it wire Helsinki to summon naval ships and sailors to the capital. Indeed it was only between nine and ten o'clock that the MRC finally took over the vital news wire service. Even as delegates to the Congress of Soviets were converging on Petrograd from all parts of the country, the Bureau was denying that an insurrection was occurring. The Bolshevik 'insurrection' was achieved with minimal mass participation and revolutionary fervor. The tempestuous clashes later depicted in Soviet movies and paintings, with raging masses and soldiers, are a myth; rather, the MRC executed a methodical, piecemeal, and surprisingly lethargic takeover of the government.

Isolated in Fofanova's apartment and cut off from the events, Lenin was beside himself with apprehension. Would his party carry out the task for which it had been formed fourteen years earlier? Would it seize state power under the best conditions it could ever have, in terms of military readiness, popular support, and governmental weakness? He did not know—and few Bolshevik leaders visited him, ostensibly to spare him the risk of being captured. But he gained the impression that even under these most auspi-

cious of circumstances, his fellow Bolsheviks were falling short of leading an insurrection.

Filled with despair, Lenin decided at around 10:30 p.m. to take a wild risk. He left his apartment, intending to make his way to the Smolny Institute. Disguised and accompanied by a bodyguard, Eino Rakhia, he traveled by a nearly empty streetcar to the Finland Station. The two men then walked on foot for nearly two miles through bitter cold to the Smolny. To cross the Liteinyi Bridge, they were obliged to pass through a mixed group of Red Guards and soldiers. Suddenly two mounted cadets stopped them and asked for their passes, which were merely poor forgeries. While Rakhia distracted the cadets, Lenin slipped by them unnoticed. 'On such chance escapes does the fate of nations and revolutions sometimes depend,' observes R.V. Daniels, in his vivid account of this precarious journey.⁹

Lenin and Rakhia finally reached the Smolny around midnight. There the Red Guards on duty refused to admit them. Rakhia had to create another distraction, allowing Lenin stealthily to slip inside the insurrectionary headquarters. After he removed his disguise, his astonished comrades duly informed him of the situation, whereupon he insisted that the MRC Bureau must drop its policy of passive resistance and aggressively take over the capital. Few historians deny that the shock of his arrival and the zealotry of his leadership galvanized a tremendous spurt of audacity among the Bolsheviks and spurred the Bureau into militancy. Between one and two o'clock on the morning of 25 October, after much delay, soldiers and Red Guards finally seized control of the telephone exchange, post office, railroad stations, power stations, and other major service facilities.

That day provincial deputies to the Congress of Soviets packed the Smolny, awaiting the opening session that had been scheduled for two o'clock in the afternoon. While they waited, the Bolsheviks and Left SRs were in the process of taking over Petrograd. During the morning hours the MRC dispatched troops and Red Guards to surround the Maryinsky Palace (where the Pre-Parliament met) and the Winter Palace (where the ministers were holed up). At around noon revolutionary troops seized the Maryinsky Palace, as planned, dispersing the Pre-Parliament in the process. At the Winter Palace the cruiser *Aurora* was positioned on the Neva River, ready to shell the palace if the ministers did not surrender, while Bolsheviks manning the guns in the nearby Peter and Paul Fortress stood on the alert. Kerensky, however, at around 11 a.m. slipped through the MRC lines at the palace and headed for the front, where he hoped to muster forces to defend his beleaguered government.

At 2:45 p.m., although the Winter Palace was still not taken, Trotsky opened a meeting of the Petrograd Soviet and informed the delegates that the Third Coalition Government 'no longer exist[ed].' Roars of approval and waves

of applause greeted this announcement, however premature it certainly was. Lenin followed him to the Soviet's podium, appearing in public for the first time since July, and called upon the delegates to endorse the insurrection. He closed his speech with the cry 'Long live the world socialist revolution!'¹⁰—to the lusty cheers of the Soviet delegates.

The Winter Palace, with the government's ministers still inside, was being defended by cadets, assorted trainees, Cossacks, and a women's 'Battalion of Death'. But these forces were quickly becoming demoralized, and their willingness to stand by the discredited regime was dwindling. At 6:15 p.m. a large group of cadets abandoned their posts and left the palace, followed less than two hours later by the Cossacks. At 9:40, from the Neva, the *Aurora* fired a blank shell at the palace, emitting an eardrum-shattering blast in the process but doing no damage to the building. Twenty minutes later half of the remaining cadets departed, and shortly thereafter the 'Battalion of Death' surrendered. To take the palace, the revolutionaries fought no heroic battles. Indeed, at around 10 p.m. small batches of armed Red Guards, soldiers, and sailors infiltrated the building, wandering through its immense and complex interior and searching for Kerensky's ministers. A few small groups of cadets tried feebly to block their path. At around eleven in the evening the artillery at the Peter and Paul Fortress began shelling the palace. Finally, at two in the morning, a group of MRC besiegers, led by Antonov-Ovseyenko, came upon the ministers and simply took them prisoner.

THE SECOND CONGRESS OF SOVIETS

The October Revolution, as it entered into history, had little of the military splendor with which Communist propaganda was to endow it. Its real grandeur came in the Smolny, where the revolutionaries took the earliest steps to give reality to their socialist ideals.

The opening of the Congress of Soviets had been delayed because Lenin insisted that the Winter Palace must first be taken and the ministers arrested. But on the evening of 25 October, the delegates in Smolny's Great Hall were becoming restless. At around 11 p.m., while the attack on the Winter Palace was still under way, the Menshevik Fyodor Dan refused to wait any longer and officially convened the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

Of the Congress's 670 delegates, about 300 were Bolsheviks and 193 were SRs. At least half the SRs were actually Left SRs and expressly supported the Bolsheviks. Together the two extreme-left groups thus had an absolute majority in the Congress. Of the rest, only 68 were Mensheviks, fourteen were

Menshevik-Internationalists, and the remainder were unaffiliated or affiliated with small groups. Dan, duly acknowledging the Bolshevik plurality, officially turned the podium over to Kamenev, who proceeded to open the session.

As artillery thundered from the Peter and Paul Fortress, Martov rose to propose that the Congress first try to prevent the use of force and establish a 'uniformly democratic power' consisting exclusively of the socialist parties. 'We should elect a delegation,' he urged, 'to negotiate with the other socialist parties and organizations for the purpose of putting an end to the strife.'¹¹ In an extraordinary gesture Anatoly Lunacharsky—a *mezhrayonts* who now spoke for the Bolsheviks—responded that this proposal was entirely acceptable to the Bolshevik Party. This astonishing act of conciliation had probably been engineered by the moderate and humanistic wing of the Bolshevik leadership, led by Kamenev. In any case, the Congress passed Martov's proposal unanimously. 'With much lingering sentiment in their ranks against a one-party dictatorship,' observes Daniels, 'the Bolsheviks were not yet prepared to repudiate such a gesture of coalition.'¹² Martov's proposal—and Lunacharsky's agreement with it—cleared the way for the creation of a soviet democracy, which might very well have been established against Lenin's wishes.

But immediately after the unanimous vote in favor of socialist unity, a series of moderate socialist speakers dissipated the amiable atmosphere by taking to the podium and bitterly denouncing the Bolsheviks. Speaking for the Mensheviks, one Lev Khinchuk indicted them for undertaking a military action against the Third Coalition Government without consulting the other parties, and for usurping the Congress of Soviets—a charge that was not baseless. The Mensheviks called upon the Congress to negotiate with the old government in order to form a new one. Rebuffed by the delegates, most of the Mensheviks and SRs then proceeded to make a self-defeating gesture of protest: they walked out of the Congress, accompanied by the Jewish Bund and other moderates. As they left the hall, the remaining delegates angrily shouted 'Deserters!' and 'Lackeys of the bourgeoisie!' By taking this fateful step, the Mensheviks and SRs left the Congress in the hands of the revolutionary extremists: the Bolsheviks, the Left SRs, and the Menshevik-Internationalists.

Martov, speaking for his fellow Menshevik-Internationalists, then made another proposal. Condemning the Bolshevik coup, he proposed that the Congress form 'an all-democratic government ... [and] appoint a delegation for the purpose of entering into negotiations with other democratic organs and all the socialist parties.'¹³ But the Bolsheviks would have none of it. Trotsky responded that this proposal amounted to a surrender to the all-but-deposed bourgeois regime:

A rising of the masses of the people requires no justification. What has happened is an insurrection, and not a conspiracy. . . . The masses of the people followed our banner and our insurrection was victorious. And now we are told: Renounce your victory, make concessions, compromise. With whom?¹⁴

Martov, fuming, thereupon stalked out of the Congress, to the catcalls of the Bolshevik delegates.

Sukhanov, a close ally of Martov in the Menshevik-Internationalists, later ruefully admitted that all these parties had made an enormous mistake in removing themselves from participation in the Congress and hence in the new regime:

First of all, no one contested the legality of the Congress. Secondly, it represented the most authentic worker-peasant democracy. . . . Thirdly, the question was: *Where* would the Right Mensheviks and the SRs leave the Congress for? Where would they go from the Soviet? The Soviet, after all, was—the revolution itself. Without the Soviet it never existed, nor could it. . . . [The Menshevik-SR bloc] could not swallow its defeat and the Bolshevik dictatorship. With the bourgeoisie and with the Kornilovites—yes; but with the workers and peasants whom they had thrown into the arms of Lenin with their own hands—impossible.¹⁵

Motivated by petty spitefulness, the Menshevik-SR bloc performed an enormous historical blunder. 'By quitting the Congress,' Sukhanov later lamented, '... we gave the Bolsheviks with our own hands a monopoly of the Soviet, of the masses, and of the revolution. By our own irrational decision, we ensured the victory of Lenin's whole "line".'¹⁶ The Bolsheviks and Left SRs were now free to establish the government they preferred and to decree whatever they chose. Unintentionally, the Mensheviks and SRs had contributed profoundly to the creation of a one-party dictatorship that would eventually destroy them.

Just as the Winter Palace was falling into the hands of its worker and soldier besiegers, then, the Congress at the Smolny fell into the hands of the Bolsheviks and Left SRs. At three a.m., upon being informed that the Winter Palace had been taken, Lunacharsky read a decree stating that supreme political authority in Russia had been transferred to the Second Congress of Soviets and to the local and provincial soviets. In short, he announced the formation of a soviet government. At five a.m. the Congress adopted the decree overwhelmingly, then adjourned, to reconvene later that day—on Thursday, 26 October—at eleven in the evening.

The proceedings of the 26 October session—the last one of the Second Congress of Soviets—are known only provisionally, since the stenographers

had walked out with the Mensheviks, but historians have tentatively pieced them together from various memoirs. According to the American Bolshevik sympathizer John Reed, when the Congress finally came together, 'a thunderous wave of cheers announced the entrance of the presidium with Lenin—the great Lenin—among them', in his first appearance before the Congress. Reed's adulatory tone probably reflected the reverence that many delegates from the provinces felt toward this man whom they may never have previously seen or heard but who had become a near-legend, variously celebrated and demonized, throughout the empire.

Now Lenin [appeared], gripping the edge of the reading stand, letting his little winking eyes travel over the crowd as he stood there waiting, apparently oblivious to the long-rolling ovation, which lasted several minutes. When it finished, he said simply, 'We shall now proceed to construct the Socialist order!' Again that overwhelming human roar.¹⁷

Lenin's first proposal was for 'the adoption of practical measures to realize peace. . . . We shall offer peace to the peoples of all the belligerent countries upon the basis of the Soviet terms—no annexations, no indemnities, and the right of self-determination of peoples.'¹⁸ He then read aloud a 'Proclamation to the Peoples of All the Belligerent Countries' that offered a three-month armistice. The Congress adopted it unanimously. Thereafter, according to Reed, the entire Congress was gripped by a

common impulse [and] we found ourselves on our feet, mumbling together into the smooth lifting unison of the *Internationale*. A grizzled old soldier was sobbing like a child. Alexandra Kollontai rapidly winked the tears back. The immense sound rolled through the hall, burst windows and doors and soared into the quiet sky. 'The war is ended! The war is ended!' said a young workman near me, his face shining. And when it was over, as we stood there in a kind of awkward hush, someone in the back of the room shouted, 'Comrades! Let us remember those who have died for liberty!' So we began to sing the Funeral March, that slow, melancholy, and yet triumphant chant, so Russian and so moving.¹⁹

But much more remained to be accomplished. Lenin read aloud a land decree that abolished all private ownership in land, without compensation, and placed all landlord and church lands in the hands of land committees and peasant soviets, to be distributed to the peasantry according to need. The decree, adopted around two a.m. on 27 October, was a decided departure from the industrialized system of agriculture favored by the conventional

Marxists. The Bolsheviks, perhaps more than they understood, had given reality to the peasant dream of *volya*, the equitable distribution of land. For the first time land was to be disposed of according to hallowed principles of *usufruct*, equality, and need. The extent to which the Bolsheviks enforced the land decree would determine the extent to which their regime would enjoy the support of the peasantry—by far the majority of the Russian people.

Lastly, this session of the Congress also approved the formation of a provisional revolutionary government. The All-Russian Congress of Soviets would be the supreme power of the land. In between its sessions a Council of Peoples' Commissars* (Soviet Narodnyk Komissarov, or Sovnarkom) would administer the country's affairs. The Sovnarkom would be responsible to the Congress. A constituent assembly would be convened in November to finalize the structure of the soviet government. The Congress expressed its assent to the new government by its applause. Three Left SRs were invited to join the Sovnarkom, but they postponed their decision to join the body, pending the possible formation of a government that included all the socialist parties, which they strongly preferred. As a result, all the commissars were initially Bolsheviks. Lenin was elected the Sovnarkom's chairman, and Trotsky its commissar of foreign affairs.

After the elections the Menshevik-Internationalist Nikolai Avilov and the Left SR Vladimir Karelin stood up and demanded that the government include wider socialist and peasant representation. The Bolsheviks, he said, could not run Russia alone: grain was lacking to feed the people of the city; peace would be difficult to obtain in view of Allied hostility to a Bolshevik soviet regime; and the European proletariat showed no signs of being in a revolutionary mood. Broader participation by socialists was therefore necessary. On behalf of the Menshevik-Internationalists and Left SRs, he then proposed the creation of a Central Executive Committee (CEC) to function as a supreme legislative institution to supervise the Sovnarkom. The proposal came to a vote and was adopted. The Congress then elected 101 CEC members, representing all the parties in attendance: 62 Bolsheviks, 29 Left SRs, six Menshevik-Internationalists, and four representatives of small groups. Kamenev was chosen as its chairman. The Congress finally adjourned at about eight a.m., and its delegates departed to scatter to all the provinces, cities, and villages of the former Russian Empire.

The October Revolution, as has been noted, involved no huge 'coming out' of the masses. No great public rallies were held; no large numbers of workers,

*The term *commissar* was derived from *commissaire*, an official appointed by the French Revolutionary Convention of 1793–4.

soldiers, or even ordinary citizens filled the streets. Instead, the people of Petrograd went about their normal daily business. The uprising had so far been virtually bloodless; Lenin himself marveled that it occurred so easily. The seizure of the Winter Palace, to be sure, involved some sporadic shooting, but the 'storming' of the palace, as dramatized in Sergey Eisenstein's docudrama *October*, with its battles and heavy gunfire, did not occur. Only nine sailors and six palace guards were killed, some by accident. (The most dramatic event occurred when masses of soldiers and onlookers took over the palace's huge wine cellar and appropriated the tsar's vintage bottles until Red Guards and troops chased them off.) The government surrendered to the insurrection's detachments with remarkable docility. So feeble was its resistance—and so few the military forces at its command—that the MRC needed only about 30,000 Red Guards, sailors and soldiers to carry out the insurrection.

Nevertheless the Bolsheviks' 'seizure of power'—as Lenin, Trotsky and other party leaders called it—was one of the most significant events of the twentieth century. Even as a terrible war ravaged Europe, the Revolution startled the whole world. Bolshevik orators predicted with naïve certainty that the Revolution would spread rapidly to the rest of the world, abolish capitalism, and open the way to universal freedom, social harmony, and a moral and equitable distribution of the means of life. The age-old dream of a just society, in which human exploitation and oppression no longer exist, seemed on the point of realization. Lenin initially chronicled the day-by-day duration of the October Revolution against the two-month duration of the Paris Commune of 1871, often citing with satisfaction, as the weeks and then months went by, that the soviet regime remained in power longer than the Commune. For the Bolsheviks on the Sovnarkom (who were soon joined by seven Left SRs), it became a point of honor to make decrees as quickly as possible to show the world, in the event of a successful counter-revolution, how a workers' state would manage public affairs. Many of these decrees gave legal reality to living facts that the workers and peasants themselves had already accomplished; others resulted from Lenin's eagerness to show the world proletariat what a revolutionary socialist regime could accomplish before it was destroyed by a counter-revolution.

On 13 November 1917, for example, the Sovnarkom promulgated the 'Draft Statutes on Workers' Control' that introduced, in the words of the decree, 'workers' control of the production, warehousing, purchase and sale of all products and raw materials ... in all industrial, commercial, banking, agricultural and other enterprises employing not less than five workers and employees (together), or with a turnover of not less than 10,000 rubles per annum.' If an enterprise was small enough, workers could exercise control directly; if large, delegates elected at mass meetings could eventually take over

factory operations. The workers or their delegates were to 'have access to *all* books and documents and to *all* warehouses and stocks of materials, instruments and products, without exception.'*

In the next months, when the Bolsheviks began to suspect that their October Revolution would not immediately be followed by a world revolution, they seemed to feel that they had nothing to lose by decreeing their most expansive utopian ideals into existence, however temporary or uncertain the outcome. The Sovnarkom rapidly issued decrees establishing a workers' militia, imposing a moratorium on house rents, nationalizing the banks, sequestering uninhabited dwellings, and establishing social insurance for workers. The regular hierarchical army was replaced by a proletarian militia in which ranks and privileges were abolished and the elections were instituted on a company level. Women gained rights equal to those of men, as well as the right to abortion on demand. Emulating the Paris Commune, the Sovnarkom limited the salary of government leaders, including its own members, to that of skilled Russian workers. Within their own party the Bolsheviks were intensely committed to maintaining egalitarian principles and rarely diminished individual rights without considerable debate and even bitter factional conflict.

DEFEATING THE MILITARY RESISTANCE

Within Petrograd nearly all the established institutions and forces—the Mensheviks, SRs and other dissidents from the former Soviet Executive Committee, as well as the City Duma, and the bourgeois parties—were hostile to the Bolsheviks. They gravitated toward the so-called Committee for the Salvation of the Country and the Revolution, which considered itself the heir of Kerensky's government and became the main center for mobilizing anti-Bolshevik forces. Initially the committee called for passive resistance to the new government and urged white-collar and civil service employees to disobey

* V.I. Lenin, 'Draft Statutes on Workers' Control' (Nov. 8–13 [Oct. 26–31], 1917), in *Selected Works* (Moscow: International Publishers, 1943), p. 6:410. But this decree undermined workers' control even as it was in the process of establishing it. Above all it provided that, while the decisions of factory committees were legally binding on factory owners, they 'could be annulled by trade unions and congresses.' In the defense industries, weapons production and any enterprises 'in any way connected with the production of articles necessary for the existence of the masses of the population' were placed under the supervision of the state, thereby opening the way to the establishment of an authoritarian bureaucracy. These loopholes made it possible for the party and the government gradually to annul the decree's effectiveness.

the new regime. Their call had a measure of success: nearly all the banks in Petrograd closed down, and widespread sabotage together with absenteeism undermined the Sovnarkom's attempts to manage the city's affairs. Many middle-class people simply went on strike, but either hunger or social pressure eventually induced them to return to their jobs, under the supervision of soviet commissars.

Kerensky, after his stealthy departure from the Winter Palace on 25 October, frantically rushed from one garrison to another in the Petrograd area, looking for troops willing to restore his government. Most of them ignored his appeals, except for General P.N. Krasnov, who commanded a number of Cossack detachments. These comprised about 700 men. The Russian military command in the Petrograd region telegraphed every front on Kerensky's behalf, in a pitiful effort to collect troops on his behalf, but few responded. Those who did try to make the journey to the capital found that the workers obstructed their rail passage and Bolshevik agitators undermined their scant resolve. En route to Petrograd, Krasnov's 700-man cavalry captured Gatchina on 27 October, and the next day they took Tsarskoe Selo, only 25 miles from the capital. As Chamberlin recounts:

With a few regiments of reliable troops Krasnov could probably have entered Petrograd. But the significant fact of the moment was that no such regiments made their appearance. Prominent political leaders ... turned up at the headquarters of Kerensky and Krasnov; but there were no fresh troops. The Cossacks, whose morale had already been lowered by the Kornilov fiasco, began to murmur, to declare that they could go no further without infantry.²⁰

On 29 October cadets in Petrograd's military schools rose up against the soviet regime and seized the Central Telephone Station as well as several other facilities, but the Cossacks in the city refused to give them any aid. The Bolsheviks surrounded the cadets' schools and barraged at least one of them with artillery shells. Sailors and Red Guards soon quelled the cadets' revolt in a battle that, before it was over, claimed 200 dead and wounded on both sides. On 30 October Krasnov's forces reached the heights of Pulkovo, directly outside Petrograd's city limits, where they encountered a determined force of sailors, several thousand strong. Patently outnumbered, Krasnov tried to attack anyway, but the sailors fought back resolutely; others fraternized with the Cossacks, whose morale had evaporated with the morning mist. His ammunition nearly gone, Krasnov retreated back to Gatchina, where he was taken prisoner. Kerensky, after contemplating suicide, decided that flight was the preferable alternative. He made his way to Murmansk and left Russia, never to return.

In the days that followed the Bolshevik seizure of power, insurrectionary soviets throughout Russia established MRCs, following the model of Petrograd. By November local MRCs and soviets had taken over most of the industrial cities with little or no bloodshed, although Bolshevik rule was temporarily challenged in Kiev, Minsk, and a few other cities. From Helsinki in Finland to Krasnoyarsk in Siberia, however, the soviets or their MRCs replaced all the agencies of the provisional government with relatively little difficulty.

A crucial exception was Moscow, the old first capital of imperial Russia, which remained a center of anti-Bolshevik feeling. Here the Bolsheviks' opponents were relatively aggressive and self-assured; to prevent soviet power from encroaching into the city, Moscow's SRs organized a determined Committee of Public Safety. On 28 October the committee's general, Ryabtsev, informed the Kremlin garrison's Bolshevik leader, I. Berzin, that unless he surrendered the city's great fortress, with its stores of weapons and ammunition, several thousand military cadets would barrage the garrison with artillery. Alternatively, if Berzin were to surrender, Ryabtsev promised, his troops would be spared. Berzin surrendered, and the Reds, as they were called, laid down their arms—only to be massacred by the cadets, in the first of many atrocities to come. The remaining Bolshevik forces resisted, barricades were erected, and street fighting followed. Red Guards from Moscow's suburbs reinforced their beleaguered comrades, as did sympathetic troops from outside the city. Finally, on 2 November, Moscow fell to the MRC, and Russia's 'second' capital came under soviet control.

Other centers of resistance to the Bolsheviks included the Cossack areas in the south, which firmly rejected soviet authority, and the city of Saratov, where the SRs had their own 'Petrograd'. Non-Russian areas also tended to hold out against Bolshevik forces, such as Finland, which declared its independence; the Ukraine, where the nationalist Rada took power in Kiev; and Georgia, which the Mensheviks controlled. By the end of the year, however, nearly all of Russia had been brought under nominal Bolshevik control. These victories, however tentative, gave the Sovnarkom time to consolidate itself as the new government of Soviet Russia.

DEMOCRACY AND THE VIKZHEL REVOLT

The Mensheviks opposed Lenin's seizure of power—not because they were reactionary or counter-revolutionary (as later Bolshevik propaganda had it), but because, in accordance with Marxist precept, they were convinced that Russia, with its population of untutored peasants and libertarian workers, was

as yet too backward materially and culturally to create a socialist society. The Bolshevik insurrection, they feared, would lead to civil war with devastating consequences, probably even a dictatorship. The German revolution upon which Lenin counted for aid seemed less in the offing than the Bolsheviks had expected—and even if a German revolutionary government were to come into existence, it would be hard pressed to assist the Russians, given the limited resources that it had at its disposal as a result of the war. Based on this assessment, the Mensheviks concluded that the Bolshevik insurrection had been nothing more than an opportunistic power grab. As Vladimir N. Brovkin has paraphrased the Menshevik view:

The masses were willing to follow those who offered ever more radical promises, even though such promises were, from the socialists' [Mensheviks'] point of view, unfulfillable. The Bolsheviks had promised the masses socialism, democracy, and prosperity as if by magic, if only all power was transferred to the soviets. The socialists were convinced that the Bolsheviks realized that there was no quick fix to Russia's problems and were throwing the country into chaos in order to gain power, instead of acting responsibly with other socialist parties.²¹

Hence the Mensheviks demanded that the soviet government should be a multiparty regime, minimally composed of all the socialist parties to assure it a broad base in the population.

The Left SRs, having remained at the Second Congress, were now open allies of the Bolsheviks, who needed them badly; without Left SR votes, they would not have been a majority in the Second Congress. Moreover, the Left SRs were gaining considerable influence among the peasants and soldiers, rapidly supplanting the influence of Chernov's SRs.

But the new party's leaders were very young: Pavel Lazimir, the Left SR chairman of the MRC, was only eighteen, while many of his comrades were in their twenties or early thirties. Worse, they were very inexperienced and unsure of themselves; Sukhanov dismissed them all as 'the children'. But they were highly principled, and their *narodnik* idealism potentially stood at odds with the Bolsheviks' hard pragmatism.

Moreover, the Left SRs strongly favored an all-socialist soviet government, as did the CEC, the regime's new 'parliament', to which the Sovnarkom was expected to be answerable. Even many Bolshevik leaders believed that the regime, if it hoped to survive, must be more inclusive: Kamenev, as the CEC chairman, decidedly supported an all-socialist government, as did Zinoviev and a number of 'soft' Bolsheviks. If the Bolsheviks tried to rule with the Left SRs only, the 'softs' asserted, the regime would not only suffer political

isolation but could very well turn Russia into a dictatorship. It was mainly Lenin and Trotsky's self-assurance that kept a large number of the Bolshevik leaders from making the government more democratic.

An all-socialist government, in Lenin and Trotsky's view, would amount to nothing less than a repudiation of the October insurrection. The Bolsheviks and Left SRs had been the ones to carry out the Revolution; they had the support of the workers and peasants; and they now bore the responsibility of ultimately creating a socialist society, if necessary through an authoritarian government led by Bolshevik 'hards'.

On 29 October, while the Bolsheviks were still fighting the cadets in the military schools of Petrograd and Moscow, the national committee of the Union of Railway Workers, or Vikzhel, stepped into the picture. This essentially Menshevik committee announced that it would sponsor a conference that very day to create an all-socialist government. The Bolsheviks were enjoined to participate in the conference and negotiate with the other socialist parties; if they declined, the Vikzhel would call a nationwide railway strike—and thereby bring troop and supply transport to a standstill. At the moment when the Vikzhel's threat was presented, it so happened, Lenin and Trotsky were absent directing operations against the Krasnov's uprising, with the result that the Bolshevik Central Committee voted unanimously to send delegates to the conference and even throw its support to the formation of an all-socialist government.

At the conference the Menshevik-SR delegates, certain that the Bolsheviks' hold on power would soon collapse, overplayed their hand: no single party, they demanded, should be permitted to have a majority in the government. Moreover, the CEC should be enlarged to include representation from the dumas as well as the soviets. Almost spitefully they demanded that Lenin and Trotsky be excluded from the Sovnarkom. As Trotsky was later to complain, the Bolshevik negotiators passively stood by while the conferees repudiated the October Revolution.

On 1 November the Bolshevik Central Committee met again, this time with Lenin and Trotsky present. Krasnov's revolt had been vanquished, and Moscow's resistance to the soviet regime was crumbling. After hearing a report on the Vikzhel conference, Lenin—who was apoplectic about the Bolshevik leaders' surrender—adamantly refused to admit the 'petty bourgeois' parties (as he called them) into the government. Then on 2 November, when the Bolsheviks defeated the resistance in Moscow, the constellation of political forces swung back in their favor. Lenin was free to curtail the 'conciliators', and by applying considerable pressure on the Central Committee, he managed by the slimmest margin to get the Sovnarkom to include himself and Trotsky and to gain at least half of the ministries for Bolsheviks. A few days later, on 4

November, Lenin issued a blunt ultimatum to Kamenev and his supporters either to accept the will of the Central Committee or face expulsion from the party.

There can be little doubt that Lenin had cowed the Central Committee—as much by the force of his personality as by the power of his arguments. It had happened before, and it would happen again. Nonetheless, not all of the Bolsheviks gave in to his will. On 7 November five members of the Central Committee—Kamenev, Zinoviev, Rykov, Nogin and Milyutin—resigned from the body in protest, publicly accusing the Bolshevik leadership of trying to create ‘a purely Bolshevik government, regardless of the sacrifices to the workers and soldiers’, and ominously warning:

We cannot assume responsibility for this ruinous policy of the Central Committee, carried out against the will of a large part of the proletariat and the soldiers who are most eager for an early cessation of blood-shedding by the different wings of the democracy.

We resign from membership in the Central Committee so that we may be free to speak openly to the workers and soldiers and to ask them to support our slogan: Long live the government of the parties in the Soviet and an immediate understanding on these terms!²²

These democratic Bolsheviks had good reason to resign from the Central Committee of a party that required them to support an important policy with which they entirely disagreed. But the Menshevik-Internationalists had no reason to withdraw in protest from the functional equivalent of a parliament, an institution that was potentially their most important forum for criticizing Lenin and Trotsky’s increasing authoritarianism and that would have given them the ears of a nationwide public. Nevertheless, repeating the error committed by the Menshevik delegates to the Second Congress of Soviets in October, the Menshevik-Internationalists too withdrew from the CEC.

Kamenev resigned as that body’s chairman. Eleven Bolsheviks resigned from the Sovnarkom, warning in a separate statement that the only alternative to an all-socialist government was ‘a purely Bolshevik government which can maintain itself only by means of political terror.’²³ The Left SRs, who had not yet joined the Sovnarkom, withdrew their members from the MRC. A. Lozovsky, a leading Bolshevik in the CEC, protested against the MRC’s institution of press censorship on 26 October.

But on the same day a cowed Zinoviev gave in to Lenin and was permitted to rejoin the Central Committee. And, still on 7 November, the CEC voted (29 to 23) to grant the still-all-Bolshevik Sovnarkom the power to rule by decree. A few weeks later, on 17 November, Lenin felt secure enough in power to admit

- the Left SRs into the Sovnarkom. In the negotiations they received several commissariats, including agriculture, justice, local government, posts and telegraphs, and two without portfolio. The admission of the Left SRs into the
- † Sovnarkom gave the government the appearance of being a coalition and deflated the arguments of remaining Bolshevik 'conciliators', who began to
- end their opposition. Kamenev and his allies retracted their resignations and asked to be reinstated to the party leadership; three months later they were readmitted into the Central Committee.

- The best chance that the new soviet government would become relatively democratic was now lost. Lenin and Trotsky had thrown democratic practices to the winds, but while blame for the failure of democracy rests greatly with
- them, it cannot be attributed to them alone. The Mensheviks and the SRs had walked out of the Second Congress of Soviets, leaving the new government to the Bolsheviks. At the Vikzhel conference the Menshevik-SR bloc had tried not only to exclude the two most popular Bolshevik leaders from the Sovnarkom but to include the dumas in an expanded CEC, which would have provided a parliamentary home for the bourgeoisie in the new regime. In effect, they had set conditions that the Bolsheviks could never have accepted and that, even had the Bolsheviks been more willing, would necessarily have prevented them from agreeing to a coalition government. Thus was lost the greatest opportunity to preserve a revolution from heading toward a totalitarian finale.

THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

The new soviet government now found itself faced with the need to convoke the long-delayed Constituent Assembly. The Assembly had become the arena par excellence where the thorniest problems in Russian politics and society were to be resolved, notably land redistribution, the republic's governmental structure, the role of soviets and trade unions, the rights of oppressed nationalities, and Russia's participation in the war. Each of these issues had been repeatedly deferred to be handled by the Assembly—whose convocation had been repeatedly deferred. The Bolsheviks had gained considerable popular support for demanding that it be convened promptly. But once they were in power, they realized that it was impossible to foresee which party or bloc of parties would gain a majority of delegates to the Assembly. The election results might well go against them. Having seized power, they were obliged to set the election date within the two weeks between 12 and 26 November, if they were to gain the confidence of the masses and hold it.

When the elections took place, however, the results were not what the

Bolsheviks wanted. The SRs gained the most votes, albeit far short of an absolute majority. Out of 41.6 million votes cast, the SRs received 15.8 million, compared with 9.8 million for the Bolsheviks, 1.9 for the Mensheviks, and a pitiful 1.9 for the liberal Kadets.²⁴ The Bolsheviks did best in the cities: in Petrograd they received 424,000, while the SRs came in a poor third (152,000); the Mensheviks were reduced to a mere splinter party (29,000). Comparable results came in from Moscow. But in the countryside the SRs prevailed heavily. Generally, the more agrarian and remote the province, the higher the SR vote. (The Ukraine was the most important exception; here the Ukrainian SRs, a nationalist party, got by far the largest vote. Throughout the south, including Georgia, where the Mensheviks had a traditionally strong foothold, the voting results primarily reflected a desire for cultural autonomy, although not for separation from Russia.) The meaning of the large SR vote is difficult to determine. Most likely, as Oliver Radkey has concluded, it did not reflect a large and stable anti-Bolshevik constituency but rather strong support for local agronomists and educators who were usually SRs. Nor did the ballots distinguish between Left SRs and the parent party, so that those who wished to vote for the Left SRs could only cast their votes for the older SR party.

On 5 January 1918, the delegates to the Constituent Assembly finally made their way to Petrograd and assembled in the Tauride Palace—which they found 'guarded' by heavily armed soldiers. Inside the assembly hall Bolshevik supporters packed the galleries and raucously subjected anti-Bolshevik delegates to humiliating catcalls and whistles whenever they spoke—another instance of the decline in democratic procedures that had begun immediately after the 24–25 October insurrection. The SR majority elected Chernov as chairman, an indication of his party's strength. His speech was somewhat conciliatory to the Bolsheviks, emphasizing his Zimmerwaldian position during the war and his desire to give the land to the peasants. But these words failed to prevent the soldiers and sailors in the gallery from repeatedly interrupting his speech, as well as all others delivered by SRs, with jeers and hoots.

The Assembly went on during the day to declare that Russia was a federal republic; to reject Bolshevik attempts to negotiate a separate peace with the Germans (see Chapter 49); and to adopt a land law that closely resembled the land decree that the Second Congress of Soviets had approved. While Chernov was reading aloud the Assembly's land law, an anarchist sailor, one Zheleznyak, elbowed his way to the podium and told the delegates to disperse 'since the guard is tired.' The Bolshevik and Left SR delegates had already walked out. Chernov finished reading the land law hastily, whereupon what remained of the Assembly quickly adopted it. The delegates then left the hall, presumably intending to return the next day.

But such a return was not to be. The first day's session was also the last one. On the following morning the delegates who arrived at the entrance to the Tauride found it barred by soviet troops. The CEC had simply dissolved the Constituent Assembly, denouncing it as a 'cover' for counter-revolution. The delegates then dispersed to their homes in the provinces. There they tried to rouse support for the aborted Assembly, but its dissolution seems to have aroused little public concern. The Russian people seemed far more occupied with the question of what the Bolsheviks would do about land and peace than with the abortion of the remote Assembly.

Thus was the Bolsheviks' formal seizure of power completed. The questions that the new rulers now faced were whether they could hold on to that power and, if they could, how they would use it.

NOTES

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3. Rodzianko quoted in Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), p. 226.
4. V.I. Lenin: 'The Bolsheviks Must Assume Power' (Sept. 12-14, 1917), in *Collected Works*, p. 26:20.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 26:21.
6. V.I. Lenin, 'The Crisis Has Matured' (Oct. 20, 1917), in *Collected Works*, p. 26:84.
7. Robert V. Daniels, *Red October: The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), p. 106.
8. This resolution appears in *ibid.*, p. 73.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
10. Quoted in Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Lenin* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964), p. 389.
11. Quoted in Daniels, *Red October*, p. 191.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 191-2.
13. Quoted in Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks Come to Power*, p. 295.
14. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 296.
15. N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917*, ed., abridged and trans. Joel Carmichael (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 631-2.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 646.
17. John Reed, 'Ten Days that Shook The World' (1919), in *The Collected Works of John Reed* (New York: Modern Library, 1995), p. 698.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 698.

19. Ibid., p. 702.
20. Chamberlin, *Russian Revolution*, pp. 330–1.
21. Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918–1922* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 11.
22. 'Resignations from the Bolshevik Central Committee' (Nov. 17, 1917), in James Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, eds., *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917–1918: Documents and Materials* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 204.
23. 'Bolshevik Resignations from the Sovnarkom' (Nov. 17 [Nov. 4], 1917), in *ibid.*; emphasis added.
24. Oliver H. Radkey, *Russia Goes to the Polls: The Election to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, 1917* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1950).

CHAPTER 49 The Emerging Dictatorship

THE BREST-LITOVSK NEGOTIATIONS

In undertaking the October insurrection, the Bolsheviks had veered sharply away from the conventional Marxist rejection of revolutionary change in a predominantly agrarian, semi-feudal country. Mensheviks and Bolsheviks had long agreed that Russia was economically unprepared for a socialist revolution, despite Marx's own qualified support for *narodnik*-type land repartition in the early 1880s.

But the unique confluence of historical circumstances in 1917—the terrible years of wartime slaughter and hunger, coupled with the extreme radicalization of the Russian proletariat—had made the October Revolution, in Lenin's eyes, not only a historical gamble but a *historical imperative*. Western capitalism had been severely weakened by the war, which the Bolshevik leader emphasized was bringing Western workers to the threshold of a socialist-type insurrection. Russia was the weakest link in the chain of international capitalism. If the Russian workers' parties took the initiative in making a socialist revolution, they might well ignite socialist revolutions in industrially advanced countries that—unlike Russia—had numerous class-conscious proletarians and an economy sufficiently developed quickly to abolish material scarcity. They could, as it were, 'give history a push' and send the European continent careering into a socialist future. Thus, for the Bolsheviks, a large part of the *raison d'être* for the October Revolution in Russia was to spark a socialist revolution in Europe—or what was called rather loosely 'the world revolution'.

Even before October, Lenin's articles and speeches in 1917 were studded with appeals for a proletarian revolution in Germany. In his brief oration upon arriving at the Finland Station, it will be recalled, he heralded the Russian Revolution as the vanguard of the international proletariat and closed with the exclamation, 'Long live the world socialist revolution!' He repeated the same

cry at the close of his speech to the Petrograd Soviet, only hours before the October uprising took place. The ideological shift represented by his April Theses had been predicated on the assumption that a proletarian revolution in Russia would ignite a proletarian revolution in Germany. After October, in a number of public speeches, the name of Karl Liebknecht, an important leader of the German revolutionary movement, was often on his lips. In February 1918, he was sanguine enough to write, 'If Liebknecht is victorious [in Germany] over the bourgeoisie in two or three weeks (it is not impossible), he will get us out of all difficulties. That is beyond doubt.'

For the Bolsheviks, world revolution was not only a long-awaited ideal; it was also a matter of dire necessity. It was axiomatic for most Russian revolutionaries that without a socialist revolution in Europe, particularly in Germany, no socialist or even Jacobin-type revolution in Russia could hope to survive, let alone transform Russian society. Proletarian revolutions in the industrialized West were expected to provide the Russian revolutionary regime with the material assistance it needed to retain power. And without such aid, Bolshevik Russia was certain to be destroyed by capitalist invasions from abroad and by a civil war at home. Thus the Bolsheviks lived in continuous expectation of a more or less immediate proletarian revolution in Germany. Further to instigate such a revolution, they eagerly sought to end the war on Germany's Eastern Front by one means or another. As soon as possible Russia must negotiate and sign, separately from the other Allies, a peace treaty with the Central Powers.

In the autumn of 1917, bringing an early peace to Russia was indispensable to maintaining Bolshevik credibility as well. Hatred of the war pervaded the army. The peasants-in-uniform who were still at the front were eager to return to their villages and stake out their claims to the expropriated land that was waiting for them. Following the October Revolution, they deserted the front lines in even greater numbers than before. So massive were the desertions that, apart from Bolshevik agitators at the front and a few scattered forces, no real army remained to oppose the German army. In December 1917, while Trotsky, as commissar of foreign affairs, was traveling through Poland to negotiate a peace treaty with Germany, he observed 'that we were not in a position to go on fighting,' adding while crossing the front lines that 'the trenches were almost empty; nobody dared to utter a word about the continuation of the war under any conditions. "Peace, peace, whatever happens!"'

On 7 November—only a few days after the insurrection—the Sovnarkom ordered the commander-in-chief of the Russian army, General N. Dukhonin, to propose an armistice to the Germans, with a view toward opening peace negotiations. Dukhonin refused, whereupon on 9 November the regime

replaced him with Nikolai Krylenko, an ensign and long-time Bolshevik. A few days later Krylenko arrived at Moghilev, where the Stavko (or supreme headquarters) was located, to take up his new post. A Provisional Revolutionary Committee was established to assume control of the army; it radically democratized the entire army, going well beyond the provisions of Order Number One. All officers were thenceforth to be elected, titles were abolished, as was the wearing of officers' epaulets, and military authority was delivered over to elected army committees. On 11 December most of the fronts sent delegates to a conference at Moghilev, where they elected a Central Committee of the Operating Army and Fleet, with Krylenko as commander-in-chief. The new commander instructed all Russian soldiers to fraternize openly with the German troops and to initiate armistice agreements at the regimental level. Although these steps gave ordinary soldiers enormous control over their commanders and even over military strategy, they still did not keep the Russian army from melting away.

Finally on 9 December, with a cease-fire in effect, Soviet Russia began formal peace negotiations with the Central Powers at the eastern German headquarters in Brest-Litovsk. Adolf Joffe, an ardent Bolshevik, represented Soviet Russia, while the German foreign minister, Richard von Kühlmann, and General Max von Hoffmann (of the German High Command) were to function as the principal spokesmen for the Central Powers.

The German officers at Brest-Litovsk shrewdly cultivated an atmosphere of bonhomie with the members of the Soviet delegation, dining with them and praising the courage of their leaders. At the same time they milked the amiable Joffe for information about conditions in Russia and the Bolshevik leaders' intentions. This cordial atmosphere came to an abrupt end on 27 December, however, when Trotsky, the new commissar of foreign affairs, arrived on the scene to replace Joffe. Insisting on separate quarters for his colleagues, including separate dining areas, Trotsky replaced chatty conversations and pretended affability with direct, forthright, businesslike negotiations.

The Bolshevik leader's aims were to use the Brest-Litovsk negotiations as a stage from which to spread revolutionary propaganda to the international proletariat. From Trotsky's pen flowed a torrent of appeals and leaflets and even formal diplomatic documents, all in German, all addressed not to generals and statesmen but to 'the people'—especially to the German and Austrian workers—calling their attention to their governments' blatant imperialism. With unequivocal faith in the internationalism of the proletariat, he called upon German and Austrian workers to rise up in outrage and support their Russian brothers by establishing their own soviet states. So zealously did he and other Bolsheviks try to reach ordinary German soldiers that Karl Radek, a Bolshevik journalist and political strategist who accompanied the

Russian delegation, opened a valise packed with propaganda and, under the very eyes of the imperial officers, distributed revolutionary literature to German troops standing nearby. With characteristic irony, Trotsky called upon the German officers themselves to inform their troops about the activities of German revolutionary socialists:

I asked in our own papers if the German staff would not be so good as to tell the German soldiers something about Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg [two German Marxists who had been confined for their antiwar activity]. We published a special leaflet on the subject for the German soldiers.³

As Isaac Deutscher observes, 'Such was the unprecedented style [Trotsky] introduced into diplomacy. Even as Foreign Secretary he remained the revolution's chief agitator.'⁴

With these public forays Trotsky hoped to drag out the negotiations as long as possible, in the hope that his propaganda, coupled with outrage at German imperialism and at the brutality of war, would contribute to the outbreak of a European revolution. As he observed in his memoirs: 'We had not, of course, given up hope of some swift revolutionary developments.'⁵ He also hoped that his behavior would induce the other Allies to participate in the Brest-Litovsk negotiations and share responsibility for the outcome. The Bolsheviks repeatedly requested adjournments, ostensibly for consultations with Petrograd, while inviting the Allied powers again and again to send their plenipotentiaries to Brest-Litovsk. France and England, needless to say, ignored them: they were eagerly awaiting the arrival of American divisions to replenish their front lines and provide the superabundant supplies that would finally bring them victory.

Trotsky's stalling tactics, however, were unnerving to the German General Staff, which angrily complained to Hoffmann about the delays. Ludendorff and Hindenburg, who were then preparing their last great offensive against Paris, pressed the Bolshevik leader to bring the negotiations to a speedy conclusion. Their need to shift German troops from the Eastern Front to the West had reached desperate proportions. Hoffmann and his fellow warlords, anticipating that the longer they waited, the more of Russia's resources they could exploit, felt no real need to end the war in the East. They knew full well that the Russian army had evaporated; indeed, a resumption of fighting could actually be a boon for Germany—it might allow the Reich to take over the Ukraine, whose rich agricultural resources could meet the needs of the hungry populations at home and in Austria. Vienna, which had depended upon Germany for food, was already on the verge of a famine.

On 5 January, Trotsky bluntly asked Hoffmann to indicate which territories the Germans planned to annex. Hoffmann thereupon proceeded to unroll a blue-penciled map that showed a huge area from the Baltic to the Black Sea. As Trotsky described it afterward:

Germany and Austria wish to cut off from the possessions of the former Russian Empire a territory comprising 150,000 square versts [approximately 100,000 square miles]. That territory includes the former Kingdom of Poland, Lithuania, and large areas inhabited by Ukrainians and White Russians. Furthermore, the line drawn on the map cuts in two the territory inhabited by the Letts and separates the Esthonians on the islands of the Baltic from the same people on the mainland. Within these regions Germany and Austria are to maintain a regime of military occupation to last not only until the conclusion of peace with Russia but also after the conclusion of a general peace.⁶

Later that same day Trotsky returned to Petrograd and reported on the negotiations. The Bolsheviks were by no means in agreement on how to proceed, and after much heated discussion, three alternative positions emerged.

Lenin insisted that the Bolsheviks must sign a peace treaty immediately on the Germans' terms, whatever those terms might be. A refusal could very well bring about a resumption of hostilities, which would undoubtedly lead to a devastating defeat: German troops could easily invade the Ukrainian heartland and overrun it as a *fait accompli*. They could even help remove the Bolsheviks from state power. But by signing a peace treaty, the Bolsheviks could gain a 'breathing space' in which to try to instigate Western revolutions that could then come to Russia's aid.

At the opposite extreme, the young Nikolai Bukharin and his Moscow comrades—the 'Left Communists'—bitterly condemned capitulation, especially at a time when revolutions, in their view, were about to sweep Europe. Along with the Left SRs and some leading Bolsheviks, they called on the Bolshevik leadership to wage a revolutionary guerrilla war against German imperialism, invoking the precedent of 1792 and the French Revolution, which greatly influenced their outlook.

Trotsky occupied an intermediate position, advancing the formula 'neither peace nor war'. The soviet regime, he contended, should not fight the Central Powers any longer; but neither should it sign their peace treaty. Rather, the Russian negotiators should try to extend the negotiations for as long as possible, in the hope that revolutions would quickly topple existing capitalist

governments in Western and Central Europe. Trotsky advanced his 'neither peace nor war' formula at a time when general strikes and peace demonstrations were taking place in key cities in Austria and Germany—which, the Bolsheviks hoped, could explode into a Central European revolution.

Lenin stood in a minority on the Central Committee, warning that Trotsky's position was too risky: revolutions were eventually possible in the West, he acknowledged, but Trotsky's position wagered the future of the soviet regime on their immediate outbreak. When the Central Committee took up the issue at a meeting on 11 January, the Bolsheviks voted (9–7) to accept Trotsky's position and authorized him to delay signing any peace treaty. Trotsky thereafter returned to Brest-Litovsk with this mandate.

The Brest-Litovsk negotiations were complicated by the eruption of armed conflict in the Ukraine. On 29 December a group of Ukrainian nationalists, hostile to the Bolsheviks, had surfaced in Kiev. Designating themselves the Ukrainian People's Republic, governed by a Central Rada (or National Assembly), this nationalist movement preferred the Ukraine to be subordinated to Berlin rather than to Petrograd, and they even asked the Central Powers to recognize the Rada as the sovereign government. The Germans were only too happy to comply. In signing the treaty with the Rada on 19 January, Hoffmann provided the Rada with German protection, in return for which he annexed a vast area of the Ukraine over which the Rada claimed to have sovereignty. Two days later Red Guards arrived on the scene and dispersed the Rada, proclaiming a soviet government over the entire Ukraine. The Central Powers obstinately refused to recognize the Bolshevik proclamation and continued to support the Rada. Indeed, on 25 January the Germans signed a peace treaty with the Rada, thereby gaining access to Ukrainian grain at Soviet Russia's expense.

In the meantime, Trotsky had arrived back at Brest-Litovsk and, on 28 January, delivered his 'Neither Peace nor War' statement to the German delegation. The soviet regime, he declared, was withdrawing from the war, issuing 'orders for full demobilization of all troops that now face the armies of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria.' Moreover, he flatly refused to 'sanction' Hoffmann's undisguisedly imperialistic demands by signing a peace treaty.⁷ The Russian statement astonished all the emissaries of the Central Powers. 'Unheard of!' Hoffmann spat out and on 29 January broke off all further negotiations with the Bolsheviks.

Like most Bolsheviks, however, Trotsky had grossly underestimated what the ordinary German soldier would do on behalf of the Fatherland, even during the bitter winter of 1918 that descended upon the starving Fatherland. The German High Command and the Kaiser were in fact delighted by the 'Neither Peace nor War' declaration. Eager to get their hands on Ukrainian

grain, they decided that Trotsky's statement terminated the truce. On 17–18 February* they launched an offensive along the entire Russian front, throwing 53 divisions against virtually empty Russian trenches. Apparently unmoved by Bolshevik propaganda, the German troops marched in perfect order against the paltry Soviet forces, who were ordered to offer them no resistance. Hoffmann cheerfully noted in his diary:

It is the most comical war I have ever known—it is almost entirely carried on by rail and motorcar. We put a handful of infantry men with machine-guns and one gun onto a train and push them off to the next station; they take it, make prisoners of the Bolsheviks, pick up a few more troops, and go on. This proceeding has, at any rate, the charm of novelty.⁸

So rapidly did the German army advance that in five days it bolted 150 miles into the country, eventually occupying Helsinki, Pskov, Kharkov, Kiev, Minsk, Rostov, and all the cities and towns in between.

Lenin, aghast, insisted that the Central Committee behave with a modicum of common sense and accept peace on the Germans' terms. This urgent demand did not deter the Central Committee, which as late as 18 February, while German troops were rolling unimpeded into Russia, voted (7–6) against Lenin's proposal. (Trotsky, it should be noted, was among those who voted against it.) Later that day news reached Petrograd that the Germans had taken Dvinsk, with its large stores of military supplies, and were moving effortlessly into the Ukrainian hinterland. This news seems to have shaken the Central Committee into its senses: it quickly convened a second meeting, where Lenin's motion—now supported by Trotsky—finally passed, albeit by a single vote!

The Bolsheviks hurriedly sent a telegram, in the name of the Sovnarkom, to Berlin wholly acceding to the Germans' terms. For three days the Germans made no response, while their troops moved farther into Russia, even threatening Petrograd. Finally, on 22 February, the Germans answered, laying down terms much harsher than those the Bolsheviks had previously spurned. Kühlmann demanded German control over all the territories that his troops now occupied, including those they had acquired since the collapse of the

* On 1 February the Bolshevik government replaced the traditional Julian calendar, still in use in Russia, with the Western Gregorian calendar. Since the Julian calendar was thirteen days behind the Gregorian, 1 February became 14 February; the date on which the Germans launched their offensive was the same in Russia and Western Europe. All dates that follow are Gregorian, unless 'Old Style' (O.S.) or a slash is placed between two dates.

Brest-Litovsk negotiations (including much of the Ukraine, Finland and the Baltic provinces). The Russians were obliged to evacuate all their troops from this vast expanse of German-occupied territory and demobilize them; pay an indemnity; intern the Black Sea, Baltic, and Arctic fleets; and privilege the Germans with economic concessions. The Bolsheviks were to desist from propagandizing against the governments of the Central Powers and recognize the Ukrainian Rada as the legitimate government of the Ukraine. Finally, Kühlmann stipulated that the treaty had to be signed at once if the German army's advance into Russia were to be halted. *terms*

In Petrograd most of the Bolsheviks on the Central Committee and the Sovnarkom balked at these patently onerous terms (which had a growing effect on German workers). But Lenin once again threatened to resign from both bodies if they did not accept the German ultimatum. The Germans, he argued, had left the soviets intact and allowed the Bolsheviks to remain in power in Petrograd. On 23 February the Central Committee voted to accept the German conditions by a small plurality: seven gave their assent, four (Bukharin and his three Left Communist supporters) still called for a revolutionary war, and four (Trotsky and his colleagues) abstained. The four Left Communists immediately resigned from the Central Committee. That evening the CEC voted to accept the German terms by 116 to 85, with 26 abstentions. The many negative votes and abstentions reflected the pain and humiliation of the capitulation. *accepted*

But the Russian acceptance of Kühlmann's ultimatum did not stop the advance of the German troops. Berlin declared that its army would continue to advance until the peace treaty was actually signed. On 3 March the angry Bolshevik delegation, now headed by Gregory Sokolnikov, arrived at Brest-Litovsk, signed the treaty without even bothering to read it, then departed at once for Petrograd. Not until one p.m. on 3 March did the German advance into Russia finally cease. Lenin, however, took no chances that the Germans might occupy Petrograd and hold the Bolshevik government captive. On the night of 10 March he secretly left the city and moved the government to Moscow, which thenceforth would be the seat of Bolshevik power and the capital of the Soviet government. ✓

The Communists, as the Bolsheviks now called themselves, had wildly overestimated the readiness of the European proletariat for socialist revolution. Exhausted by the war, the German proletariat was by no means eager to carry out a revolution, and even if it had taken power, it decidedly would not have had the material means to help Russia. Nationalism and deeply ingrained habits of obedience to the state determined to a remarkable degree the behavior of all the European combatants, even those who had been influenced by socialist movements before the war. Until the collapse of the Western Front, they exhibited only an episodic and often uncertain belief in the

precepts of their socialist parties. Neither revolutionary propaganda, nor appeals to class solidarity with Allied workers, nor devotion to socialism was decisive in effacing the will of the German workers to fight in 1918; rather, what proved to be of primary importance in subverting Ludendorff's offensive in the spring and summer of the war's last year was the influx of American material and troops to the Allied side.

Lost The Communists' idealization of the German proletariat's revolutionary will cost them dearly: Russia lost almost 1.3 million square miles (roughly 25 per cent of her territory), an area that contained 62 million people (nearly 45 per cent of her population), a third of her crops, 80 per cent of her sugar factories, approximately three-quarters of her iron and coal production, and 9000 of her 16,000 industrial installations.

Although the Sovnarkom had signed the Brest-Litovsk treaty, the All-Russian Congress of Soviets had yet to ratify it. Lenin persisted in warning the Congress, which met on 14–18 March in Moscow, that Russia could not have withstood the German advance—‘We have no army; we could not keep the army at the front’⁹—and the Communist/Left SR government needed a ‘breathing space’ to consolidate the still very fragile revolution. His warning carried no weight with the Left SRs, however, who bitterly opposed the treaty and mobilized their forces against its acceptance. As one Left SR leader argued:

By ratifying this robber treaty we admit that we are traitors to those parts of Russia that are being handed over to the Germans in order to save other parts. By the time we get our breath the revolutionary proletariat will be dead and Russia, cut off from her economic resources and loaded down with indemnity, will have no chance to recuperate or offer any resistance in the future.¹⁰

The All-Russian Congress of Soviets voted with Lenin, ratifying the treaty 784 to 261. But this ‘victory’ produced a fatal cleavage within the government. The Left SRs remained intransigently unreconciled to their defeat. On 16 March they repudiated the ratification as a ‘betrayal of the international program and of the Socialist Revolution begun in Russia.’¹¹ They then resigned from the Sovnarkom, bringing to an end the soviet coalition government—and inadvertently, as the Mensheviks had done before them, facilitating the formation of a one-party state.

The Communists had achieved Lenin's aim of gaining a ‘breathing space’. For four or five months after October, before bloody civil war swept over the country, they were able to consolidate the regime without significant interference from their opponents. But this ‘breathing space’ and the civil war that followed it saw vast readjustments in the Bolshevik policies that had been

decreed during the first flush of the Revolution—replacing the ‘utopian’ phase of the revolution with an increasingly authoritarian behemoth.

THE DECLINE OF SOVIET DEMOCRACY

Lenin's views of democracy were infuriatingly ambiguous. His Menshevik opponents in 1917 saw him as the reincarnation of Mikhail Bakunin, while the anarchists themselves saw him as the reincarnation of Robespierre, the grave-digger of revolutionary democracy. Both views are simplifications. On the question of democracy, Lenin was above all a pragmatist. In his view all political ideas and structures, as well as democratic rights, were ‘super-structural’ products of economic realities, which had the only true history and whose progress lifted humanity out of animality and held the promise of culminating in social emancipation. Like morality, ideals, culture, and philosophy, democracy was basically the offspring of economic interests, a means for ‘educating humanity’ and effacing barbarism. It could be used or discarded, depending upon whether its existence or its abolition served the interests of ‘the Revolution’. Democracy was not an end in itself; depending upon the practical needs that confronted the revolutionary party, democratic rights could be strategically expanded or attenuated in order to strengthen the self-anointed revolutionary party vis-à-vis its rivals in the struggle for political power. Lenin's views of democracy are expressed in his behavior, not in his writings. ‘Leninism,’ as Lenin's theoretical corpus was called after his death, should be conceived less as an expression of ideological precepts than as a record of techniques oriented toward the attainment and use of power. It is against this pragmatic background that the devolution of the relatively free soviet state into the Bolshevik dictatorship and finally the Stalinist autocracy must be understood.

The forceful dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918 meant that the government headed by the Bolsheviks (and, until March, their Left SR allies) would remain in place for the time being. It was not until 10 July 1918, that the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets adopted a new constitution for what was to be called the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic (RSFSR). The new constitution seemed to validate the direct democracy that was embodied in the plethora of soviets that had sprung up all over Russia in 1917. During the first six to eight months of the Revolution the local soviets, especially those in small towns and villages, had been exceptionally free to manage their own affairs and often ignored with impunity the directives emanating from Moscow. Indeed, the supreme power often rested in the

soviets' assemblies, rather than their executive committees. Power thus flowed not from the top down but from the bottom up. Hence the opening sentence of the Constitution read: 'Russia is proclaimed a Republic of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies. All central and local authority is vested in these Soviets.'¹²

The Constitution structured the soviets into a pyramidal hierarchy that consisted of district (*volost*), county (*uezd*), provincial (*guberniya*), and regional (*oblast*) levels and, in the cities, the urban and district levels. Article 53 laid out this structure and its congresses:

Oblast congresses [of soviets] consist of representatives of city soviets ... and of *uezd* congresses of soviets. ... *Gubernia* congresses consist of representatives of city soviets ... and of [representatives of] *volost* congresses of soviets. ... *Uezd* congresses consist of representatives of village soviets. ... *Volost* congresses consist of representatives of all the village soviets of the *volost*.¹³

At each level the congress of deputies elected not only an executive committee but deputies to the next higher level. The Constitution allocated a degree of power to local rural assemblies: 'In rural districts where it is considered possible, questions of administration shall be directly decided by the general assembly of electors of such districts.' (Article 57)

But the Constitution severely limited the jurisdiction of the local soviets. In addition to handling various local problems, they were empowered essentially to 'enforce all orders of the higher organs of the Soviet Government' (Article 61). This provision made it legally possible for the higher and less representative soviet bodies to nullify the decisions of the lower, more representative soviets:

The congresses of soviets and their executive committees have the right to exercise control over the acts of the local soviets (i.e., the *oblast* congress exercises control over all soviets of the *oblast*, the *gubernia* over all soviets of the *gubernia*, ... etc.). The *oblast* and *gubernia* congresses of soviets and their executive committees have in addition the right to repeal decisions of the soviets in their areas. (Article 62)

Thus even as the Constitution institutionalized the soviets and the institutions of the central government, it did so in such a way as to structure them into a highly centralized governmental pyramid that could eliminate the flow of power from the bottom up.

This immense structure culminated in the All-Russian Congress of Soviets,

which officially constituted the supreme legislative authority in Russia and was made up of representatives from the proximate lesser soviets. It was the equivalent of a parliament and included peasants' as well as workers' and soldiers' deputies. The Congress of Soviets, moreover, was to convene twice a year; its meetings were venues where even Communists could voice criticisms of governmental policy and propose changes in the state structure. As such, the Communist leadership treated the congresses 'as serious events,' notes T.H. Rigby, 'calling for the deployment of considerable resources of oratory, persuasion and manipulation.'¹⁴ To handle matters that arose in between its biannual meetings, it authorized the much smaller CEC to function in its stead as an interim 'parliament'.

The Constitution of July 1918 legitimized not only the CEC but also the Sovnarkom, which was officially responsible to the Congress of Soviets and theoretically stood in relationship to the Congress—and its surrogate, the CEC—somewhat as the British Cabinet does to the House of Commons. But although the Constitution seemed to require that the Sovnarkom be accountable to the CEC, it gave it the legal authority to issue decrees (Article 38), which annulled the Sovnarkom's subordination to the CEC. Enactments and decisions of the Sovnarkom were to be subject to the CEC 'for [its] consideration and approval', but the constitution significantly allowed that 'emergency measures may be enacted on the sole authority of the Council of Peoples' Commissars [i.e. the Sovnarkom]' (Article 41), imparting to the Sovnarkom the power completely to bypass the CEC¹⁵—a patent breach of earlier democratic procedure. Presided over by Lenin, the Sovnarkom carried out day-to-day policy-making, heading a growing bureaucratic array of commissariats. It quickly became the principal means for concentrating power in ever-fewer hands, until only a small committee eventually began to rule the entire state.

When the Constitution vested such enormous power in the Sovnarkom, it was legitimizing a situation that had already existed. Soon after the October Revolution Lenin and some of the other commissars had begun to erode the authority of the CEC by issuing decrees entirely in the name of the Sovnarkom. On 26 November the Sovnarkom, on its own authority, created a Supreme Economic Council, centrally to manage economic and financial affairs (2 December), and it recognized only civil rather than religious marriage, established divorce on demand, and instituted the full juridical equality of men and women (5 December). The banking system was nationalized (14 December), and the stock exchange abolished (25 December). Church and state were separated (9 February), and the Russian government's debts repudiated (10 February). As desirable as many of these policies were, it must be noted, the way they were issued marked a flat violation of soviet legality and democratic procedures.

As early as 4 November, at a meeting of the CEC, eleven leading Left SRs demanded that Lenin explain '1. Why decrees or other [official] acts are not submitted to the Central Executive Committee and 2. If the government intends to give up this arbitrarily constituted and altogether illegal procedure of issuing decrees.'¹⁶ The Bolsheviks on the CEC responded by flatly condemning democratic procedures as bourgeois: 'The Soviet parliament of the toiling masses has nothing in common with the procedure of bourgeois parliaments where different class and divergent interests meet and where the representatives of the ruling class use rules of procedure for the purpose of parliamentary obstruction.'¹⁷

As the months passed, the CEC's power and importance were steadily diminished. As the last venue in which socialist opposition movements could criticize the Bolsheviks, its steady loss of authority now constituted a steady loss of democracy within the regime. The Constitution also worked to shore up the power of the Communists. The suffrage for the election of representatives to the soviets was weighted heavily in favor of the urban proletariat (which also included an appreciable number of 'clerical workers', many of whom were simply party functionaries) at the expense of the peasantry. According to Article 25, the urban soviets were granted one deputy to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets for every 25,000 electors, while the *guberniyas*, in the countryside, were given one for every 125,000. As Oskar Anweiler notes, 'This unequal ratio clearly favored the proletariat and introduced a quota system within "soviet democracy", to compensate at least partially for the immense numerical superiority of the peasantry and to advertise the historic proletarian mission in establishing socialism.'¹⁸ The Communists were badly in need of this 'advertisement': their party had sunk very few roots into the vast peasant masses of Russia.

As early as 28 October 1917, the Sovnarkom took a major step in abridging democracy by decreeing the shutdown of liberal and socialist newspapers, damning them all as bourgeois, including—the following July—Maxim Gorky's independent socialist periodical *Novaya Zhizn'*. Then five weeks later, on 7 December, a new and fateful power was created that cast all pretensions of soviet legality to the winds: a secret police. At Lenin's own instigation, the Sovnarkom established the Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counter-revolution, Speculation, and Sabotage, usually known by its infamous acronym, the Cheka. Felix Dzerzhinsky was appointed its head and Martyn Latsis, a Left SR, his deputy. Perhaps some dim scruples on the part of the Cheka's creators expected that the cultivated and sensitive Dzerzhinsky, a Polish poet who had suffered heavily under tsarist persecution, would be humane enough to prevent so powerful a body from becoming a pernicious institution. Prototypically 'spiritual', even monkish in appearance, as well as tubercular and ascetic,

Dzerzhinsky seemed an otherworldly type of inquisitor: at a later time he is reported to have deeply lamented and even wept over the number of lives the Cheka had claimed. But the network he created penetrated deeply into all aspects of Russian life, freely violating—with Lenin's decided approval—all legal and ethical standards, using many more powers and terrorist methods than had been exercised by the old regime. It is fair to say that the Cheka—as well as its later incarnations, like the GPU and NKVD—became immensely more important in establishing an authoritarian regime in Russia than any other governmental institution. As Soviet Russia became a police state, it was the Cheka, more than any other single institution, that carried the process along.

Another step in transforming the soviets from democratic bodies to instruments of control was taken when the Communists began to eliminate the socialist opposition parties. In the late winter and early spring of 1918, a Menshevik-SR electoral bloc participated—legally—in elections to many urban soviets. Adopting an economic program that departed from conventional Marxism, they called for a mixed economy rather than a fully nationalized one. Given the prevailing economic conditions in Russia, this was an eminently sensible proposal. It appealed to workers and peasants alike, winning majorities for the Mensheviks and SRs in many urban soviets. In the countryside SRs and Left SRs gained outright majorities in a number of provincial soviet elections.

But wherever Mensheviks, SRs, or Left SRs gained a majority, the Communists would step in and either disband the offending soviet or else expel the socialist deputies, delivering the soviet over to Communist Party members or functionaries, who thereupon reoriented the soviet's policies in conformity with government policy. 'This amounted to a coup d'état by the Bolsheviks against the system of soviets as institutions of popular sovereignty'—the very system they had demanded, as Vladimir N. Brovkin observes, only a few months earlier.¹⁹

On 14 June 1918, the Communists put an end to the Menshevik-SR electoral victories altogether. They expelled the Mensheviks and SRs from the CEC and all other governmental bodies (charging them with fomenting uprisings in Siberia and the south). All soviets throughout Russia were ordered to follow suit. Menshevik and SR newspapers were closed down wholesale or driven underground. Scandalously, among the Mensheviks expelled from the CEC was the highly respected revolutionary Julius Martov, who had once been Lenin's closest friend and comrade. As a Communist eyewitness, E. Drabkine, later recalled:

Martov, swearing at the 'dictators', 'Bonapartists', 'usurpers', and 'grabbers' in his sick, tubercular voice, grabbed his coat and tried to put it on, but his

shaking hands could not get into the sleeves. Lenin, white as chalk, stood and looked at Martov. A Left S.R., pointing his finger at Martov, burst into laughter. Martov turned round to him and said: 'You have no reason, young man, to be happy. Within three months you will follow us.' His hands trembling, Martov opened the door and left.²⁰

The expulsion of the Mensheviks and SRs in June 1918, however, served only to enhance the status of the two parties in the eyes of the workers, most of whom wanted precisely what their bloc's program called for: freely elected soviets, free trade unions, and freedom of speech and assembly for all workers' parties. Members of the two parties continued to participate in trade unions, factory committees, and other non-governmental institutions, where they became far more popular than the Communists.

But the shift in sentiment came too late. No sooner did the workers begin to express a preference for the Mensheviks or SRs than the Cheka took immediate and forceful steps to block them. On 24 June 1919, when workers of several important railway lines went on strike, the Alexandrovsky railway workers angrily wrote that they regarded the authority of Whites (counter-revolutionaries) and Reds 'as equally shameful, because this authority is not the authority of the soviets because nobody other than the Communists,' they complained, 'can be elected there, and if [a non-Communist] is elected, he would wind up not in the soviet but in the Butyrk jail.'²¹ This statement by politically conscious workers had no impact whatever on the regime, whose power now rested on the Cheka, not on the soviets.

For the next two years, after June 1918, the Communists harried the Mensheviks and SRs by turning the spigot of legality on and off as need arose, variously suspending their exclusion from the soviets and reinstituting it as need arose. Some party leaders were arrested, only to be released and then arrested again. Even Martov was not spared: he was briefly arrested in August 1918. The regime trotted out Mensheviks and SRs to appear at official functions where foreign visitors were present. Thus did the regime allow the socialist opposition a measure of democracy—only to force them back into semi-legality after the visitors had departed.

On 30 August 1918, Fanny Kaplan, a former anarchist turned SR, tried to assassinate Lenin, firing several bullets into him point-blank outside a Moscow factory where he had just given a speech. Although Lenin survived, he never fully recovered his health.²² In response, on 5 September 1918, the Sovnarkom officially proclaimed the initiation of a 'Red Terror'. The Terror authorized the Cheka to 'shoot all persons associated with White Guard organizations, plots, and conspiracies'—that is, anyone the Cheka selected.²³ It legally removed all limits on the Cheka's powers to eliminate 'internal enemies'—that is, to

function as 'an apparatus for compulsion and purification.'²⁴ Large-scale roundups of opponents followed, and unknown thousands—including SRs, anarchists, a variety of socialists, as well as Kadets and monarchists—were executed for real or suspected offenses. Although the Cheka did not invent concentration camps for masses of prisoners (the British have that distinction, in the Boer War), it administered a large number of them and, as time went by, made them a permanent feature of Russian society. Many abuses of the Cheka were by no means institutionalized, however; often individual Cheka functionaries, drunk with power, took matters in their own hands and made careless, even heartless life-and-death decisions entirely on their own initiative.

By degrees, however, the Cheka and its secret police heirs became a state within the state, making the dictatorship ubiquitous and turning the revolution with all its emancipatory hopes into a chronic counter-revolution against the Russian masses, particularly the peasantry. As Angelica Balabanoff, a disillusioned former Communist, observed in her memoir:

The tragedy of Russia and, indirectly, of the revolutionary movement in general, began when terror became a habit rather than an act of self-defence. Even before I left Russia I had come to the conclusion that its leaders had become accustomed too soon to follow the path of least resistance—the extermination of opposition in any form.²⁵

Similar views were expressed by other former supporters of the Communist Revolution who retained their socialist ideals. Victor Serge (one of the best-known ex-Communists who, after his break with the Communist International, remained a humanist socialist) was convinced that 'the formation of the Chekas' in the different provinces of Russia

was one of the gravest and most impermissible errors the Communist leaders committed in 1918, when plots, blockades, and interventions made them lose their heads. All evidence indicates that revolutionary tribunals, functioning in the light of day (without excluding secret sessions in particular cases) and admitting the right of defence, would have attained the same efficiency with far less abuse and depravity. Was it so necessary to revert to the procedures of the Inquisition?²⁶

In late 1918 the Mensheviks dropped their demand for a new Constituent Assembly and accepted the October Revolution as an irreversible reality, a step that might well have brought them full legality. Indeed in January, as Admiral Kolchak's White Army marched westward toward Moscow (see Chapter 50), the Communists fully legalized the Mensheviks and the PSR in soviet territory,

opening the spigot and permitting them to participate in soviet elections. Owing to their usefulness in warding off the Whites, they were allowed to a limited degree to publish their newspapers. But this period lasted only a few weeks. On 31 March 1919, the government turned the spigot off and carried out mass arrests of Mensheviks. Movingly, Martov wrote in protest:

[The Chekists] close down our newspaper and then inform us that this closing-down is not unconditional and that we may receive a permit again, provided we guarantee that we will not undermine the 'resistance power of Soviet Russia against its enemies.' They seal our office, unseal it and then re-seal it. They arrest us under the pretext of checking our documents and announce beforehand in the press that five deserters have been found among us. They release us with apologies and arrest us again a week later. In between, the Praesidium of the Moscow Soviet declares that we are a legal party; a few days later the same Moscow Soviet declares us to be enemies of the working class and in its resolution sanctions mass arrests among our party members and the campaign of slander against us by the official newspapers.²⁷

In March 1919 the government became still more authoritarian: the Communist Party's Central Committee took over the functions of the Sovnarkom and the CEC as the supreme authority in the country. As a subcommittee of the Central Committee, a new five-man Political Bureau (or Politburo) was created, whose members were Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Kamenev, and Krestinsky. As the Central Committee grew in size and unwieldiness, the Politburo became the supreme *de facto* policy-making body in the realm. The Bureau now made decrees and simply registered them with the Sovnarkom, thereby excluding all other party and soviet bodies from the state's decision-making process. Local party committees and members were no longer needed as anything more than executors of higher committee decisions. Finally, since the soviet executive committees consisted mainly of Communist Party members, all soviet personnel became mere functionaries of the higher party committees. In short, as early as March 1919 a one-party state began to rule the former tsarist empire, and Trotsky's insightful prediction as a young man—that Bolshevik policy would result in a one-man dictatorship—was less than a decade away from fulfillment.

The soviets, in effect, had become 'transmission belts' for party rule. In his survey of this monumental power shift, Orlando Figes appropriately observes:

The transformation of the VIKs [*volost* soviet executive committees] represented the central mechanism in the process of Bolshevik state-building in

the rural areas during the civil war. The VIKs were the kernel of the soviet administrative structure in the countryside. During the early period of the revolution the majority of the VIKs comprised up to a dozen or more peasants, and perhaps one or two rural *intelligenty*, who met on an amateur and nonpartisan basis to implement the resolutions of the *volost'* assembly. . . . By the end of 1920, most of the VIKs had become bureaucratized state organs, run by three to five executive members, most of them in the Bolshevik party, and a team of salaried officials.²⁸

Meanwhile, popular soviet institutions met less and less frequently, leaving executive committees free to exercise power in their absence. Although the All-Russian Congress of Soviets was required constitutionally to meet at least twice a year, as we have seen, after the Sixth Congress in 1918 it began to convene more rarely. On 6 December 1919, at the Seventh Congress, the Mensheviks dared to point out that although the Constitution required the CEC to convene every six months, it had not met at all during the previous year. Elections to the Moscow Soviet had not taken place for eighteen months, in flat violation of soviet legality, and throughout Russia the executive committees of the local soviets were taking over the functions of the soviet assemblies themselves, rendering soviet democracy meaningless.

The Menshevik-Internationalists now began to play a heroic role in trying, against all odds, to preserve what they could of the rapidly dwindling authority of the soviets. The Communists, despite all their efforts since June 1918, still failed to rid the local soviets entirely of the socialist opposition parties. Although the Mensheviks and SRs were barred from the soviets and often persecuted scandalously, opposition parties remained at least technically legal: as late as 1920, 45 Menshevik delegates were elected to the Moscow Soviet, more than 225 in Kharkov, and sizable delegations surfaced in at least twenty-odd soviets elsewhere. They also greatly outnumbered the Communists within the trade unions in 1919-20. So popular were the Mensheviks and SRs becoming that the Communists were obliged to deal prudently with them lest they antagonize their principal—if already dwindling—social base, the working class itself.

Ultimately, however, the civil war hardened the Bolsheviks' resolve to eliminate all socialist opposition. Soon after the fighting was over, Mensheviks and SRs were repressed with a ferocity that far exceeded even Nicholas's reign. In August 1920, as the all-Russian Menshevik conference in Moscow began its deliberations, the Cheka rounded up and arrested the entire conference. Cities were swept clean of leading Mensheviks, who were arrested simply for being Mensheviks. As to the SRs of all kinds, the late summer of 1920 saw SR leaders either joining the Mensheviks in prisons and concentration camps or escaping

abroad. In a final assault during February 1921, 2000 Mensheviks were imprisoned, including their party's entire Central Committee. This time they were not released. Nearly every outlet for the expression of dissenting opinion was closed off, and thereafter, whenever a Congress of Soviets convened, it amounted to little more than a ceremonial gathering of functionaries obedient to their Communist leadership. Lenin and his party were obliterating all traces of democracy within the soviet system. By 1921 nearly all the utopian ideals of the October Revolution were fading political memories.

NOTES

1. V.I. Lenin, 'A Painful But Necessary Lesson' (Feb. 25, 1918), in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963), p. 27:65; emphasis added.
2. Leon Trotsky, *Lenin: Notes for a Biographer*, trans. Tamara Deutscher (1924; rpt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), p. 99.
3. Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), p. 364.
4. Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed—Trotsky: 1879–1921* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 352.
5. Trotsky, *Lenin*, p. 99.
6. Extract from Trotsky's Statement (Jan. 5 [Jan. 18], 1918), in James Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, eds., *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1918: Documents and Materials* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1934), p. 498.
7. 'No Peace and No War' (Jan. 28/Feb. 10, 1918), in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 510.
8. Max Hoffmann, *War Diaries and Other Papers*, trans. Eric Sutton (London: M. Secker, 1929), p. 1:207.
9. 'The Fourth Congress of Soviets Ratifies the Treaty' (Mar. 1918), 'Summary of Lenin's Argument for Ratification', in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 531.
10. 'The Fourth Congress of Soviets Ratifies the Treaty' (Mar. 1918), 'Summary of Kamkov's Argument Against Ratification', in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 532.
11. 'The Socialist-Revolutionists of the Left Repudiate the Ratification' (Mar. 16, 1918), in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 533.
12. 'Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic' (adopted Jul. 10, 1918), in James Bunyan, ed., *Intervention, Civil War, and Communism in Russia, April–December 1918: Documents and Materials* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1936), p. 507. All the following quotations from the Constitution are taken from this source.
13. Article 53, Constitution, in *ibid.*, pp. 517–18.
14. T.H. Rigby, *Lenin's Government: Sovnarkom 1917–1922* (Cambridge, London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 162.
15. Constitution, in Bunyan, *Intervention*, p. 514.
16. 'The Socialist Revolutionists Object to the Procedure of the Sovnarkom' (Nov. 4 [Nov. 17], 1917), in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 188.

17. 'The Central Executive Committee Approves the Procedure of the Sovnarkom' (Nov. 4 [Nov. 17], 1917), in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 189.
18. Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers', Peasants', and Soldiers' Councils 1905-1921*, trans. Ruth Hein (New York: Pantheon, 1974), p. 225.
19. Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918-1922* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 16.
20. *Novy Mir*, no. 9 (1958); quoted in Israel Getzler, *Martov: A Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat* (Cambridge: Melbourne University Press, 1967), p. 182. The prediction was highly prescient: the Left SRs would themselves be expelled only three weeks later.
21. Quoted in Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines*, p. 65.
22. Angelica Balabanoff writes that the execution of Kaplan brought Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, to tears: 'I could see that she was deeply affected at the thought of revolutionaries condemned to death by a revolutionary power.' Such sensibilities still existed during Lenin's convalescence, but they died rapidly during the civil war. See Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 188.
23. 'Red Terror Legalized' (Sept. 5, 1918), in Bunyan, *Intervention*, p. 239.
24. Martyn Latsis, quoted in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 296n.
25. Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel*, p. 185.
26. Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary: 1901-1941*, trans. and ed. Peter Sedgwick (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 80-81.
27. Quoted in Getzler, *Martov*, p. 189.
28. Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution (1917-1921)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 220.

CHAPTER 50 The Russian Civil War

THE POLARIZATION OF FORCES

Before the October Revolution most socialists were concerned that a Bolshevik seizure of power could lead to a civil war in Russia, as the various counter-revolutionary forces coalesced to suppress all the gains of February. Lenin tried to allay this fear by suggesting that insurrectionists in Russia could trigger an international socialist revolution and establish a soviet state so stable that the reactionary elements would not dare to challenge it. But in the spring of 1918 the worst fears of Kamenev, Martov, and Chernov came to pass: a brutal and lengthy civil war erupted, one that would last nearly four years.

Counter-revolutionary or White armies emerged that blatantly fought to topple the soviet regime and reinstate as much of the old order as they could. Meanwhile on 15 January 1918, the Bolsheviks announced the establishment of a new army—the Red Army—under the command of Leon Trotsky, the commissar of war, who fashioned it into a viable force of 3 million rigorously disciplined troops.

In March 1918 British Royal Marines, American sailors, French artillerymen, and even Serbian infantry occupied Murmansk, Archangel, and other ports in the far north, where they deposited huge stores of Allied war material. Later that year, in the south, French troops occupied Odessa, while in November British troops landed in Novorossiysk on the shores of the Black Sea and Batum along the Caspian, even penetrating into the Caucasian Mountains. In April, American troops occupied Vladivostok, while the territorially acquisitive Japanese landed forces on northern Sakhalin Island and ports along the Russian coast of the Sea of Okhotsk. As it turned out, these occupations had relatively little effect on the civil war—except for the fact that through them lavish supplies of weapons entered Russia. Through raids and black market dealers, these weapons filtered into the population at large. By

1919, with arms in abundant supply, thugs as well as idealists could easily create a partisan band.

THE SR REBELLION

Following the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918, six SR deputies fled to Samara, the capital of the Volga region, which had been an SR stronghold for years. The SR delegates wanted to restore the Constituent Assembly as the 'soviet' of a 'united, independent, free Russia.' They established the Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly (Komuch, in the Russian acronym), asserting that it was the sole existing central government. The Komuch, composed of fourteen SR members and a lone Menshevik, called upon all the non-Bolshevik Assembly deputies to join it and succeeded in recruiting about 100 of them, mostly SRs.

Its essentially bourgeois program eschewed soviets in favor of municipal dumas, would restore private property, and repudiated all 'socialistic experiments', declaring 'that it is impossible to abolish capitalist forms of industry at the present time.' Indeed, 'capitalist forms of industry must exist,' declared the Komuch in the Volga region, where it established a viable government, 'and capitalists as a class must be allowed to direct them.'¹ The Volga Komuch disempowered the factory committees and restored the factories and the banks to their original owners. Despite its opposition to Communist rule, however, the Komuch itself did not hesitate to suppress opposition parties and their presses.

In the spring of 1918 the authority of the Komuch was suddenly enhanced when it gained a major military ally of inestimable value. The Czech Legion, a well-armed and highly disciplined force of about 30,000 Czechs and Slovaks, had been traveling eastward through Russia on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. This force, recruited by nationalist leaders, was organized to fight alongside the Allies for a Czech and Slovak homeland. To travel from Russia to the front, they were obliged to travel eastward across Siberia, then to the United States and finally to Europe. The Legion had no quarrel with the Communists and were initially friendly to them. But in late May 1918, while crossing Siberia, the Legion encountered irresponsible and prickly Red Army troops who provoked an armed military clash. Inexplicably, Trotsky ordered them to surrender their arms—a blunder that turned the Czech Legion, a considerable military force, into an opponent of the entire soviet regime, driving them into the arms of the Komuch.

In mid-May 1918 the Czech Legion (aided by the Komuch's own smaller

force) succeeded in capturing Samara, the capital of the Volga region. Thereafter the Legion took one town after another, encountering little Communist resistance. By the late summer of 1918 it had gained control of most of the area between the Volga River and the Ural Mountains. The victories culminated on 8 August with the capture of Kazan, where the imperial gold reserve was still stored. At its peak in the summer of 1918, the Komuch governed an area inhabited by 14 million people and had mobilized (by conscription) a so-called People's Army of roughly 60,000 men. The British, impressed by the Legion's fighting ability—it had defeated the poorly organized Red forces in almost every engagement—were eager to keep it in Siberia as a regular army that could be deployed against the soviet regime.

The soviet government, faced with this series of defeats, instituted the 'Red Terror' (consciously emulating the Jacobins) by giving the Cheka unlimited authority to execute soldiers who refused to fight or showed insufficient zeal in battle, as well as peasants who hesitated to surrender their grain. It also set up concentration camps for 'enemies of the revolution'. The population, both civilian and military, lived in a state of continual fear of arbitrary imprisonment or summary execution.

Trotsky, as if to compensate for his error in alienating the Legion, imposed a formidable regimen of discipline on the hitherto relatively democratic Red Army. In September he assembled 70,000 newly disciplined troops and set out to retake the lost Volga towns, including Samara and Kazan. Meanwhile Czechoslovak independence was declared on 28 October 1918, and the Legionnaires, weary of fighting, ceased to function as an organized military force. They were eager to return home. In their absence the Red Army succeeded in defeating the Komuch, whereupon the SRs dissolved it and fled eastward to Ufa.

A full-scale civil war was now under way. Initially at Ufa and then more permanently at Omsk, another group of SRs established a 'Provisional Government of Autonomous Siberia'. The Omsk SRs were more right wing in their political orientation than their compatriots in the Komuch. Unlike most socialists, they were prepared to enter into a working relationship not only with the Kadets but also with outright monarchists and anti-Semites. In fact, even before the collapse of the Komuch, reactionaries from the Volga region flocked to Omsk and set up a government that was soon dominated by rightists and monarchist officers. The Omsk government nullified all Communist laws and formed its own army, composed of brutal Siberian conscripts and notoriously murderous Ural'sk and Orenburg Cossacks. In September, at the behest of the Allies, the Omsk government was obliged to merge with the remaining Komuch, thereby forming a new government whose executive arm consisted of a five-man Directory that claimed to be the only legitimate gov-

ernment in Russia. The more liberal Komuch members, defeated by the Red Army, went along with this new reactionary, even dictatorial regime.

On 17–18 November, however, a clutch of Cossacks and army officers staged a coup against the Directory, which they apparently found too liberal for their taste, and invited Admiral Alexander Kolchak to become military dictator or, more formally, 'supreme ruler'. Kolchak, who had commanded the Black Sea Fleet under the tsar, was a dyed-in-the-wool monarchist whose favorite reading was reportedly the anti-Semitic forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The admiral accepted the invitation and formed a military government, whereupon he quickly abolished the moderate local dumas and arrested and deported the SR leaders in his region. Britain, influenced by Winston Churchill's unrelenting anti-Bolshevism, eagerly recognized Kolchak's sovereignty and gave him massive quantities of rifles, machine guns, and ammunition, as well as sufficient clothing and equipment for more than half a million men, making the 'supreme ruler' the most important counter-revolutionary leader in Siberia.

REDS VERSUS WHITES

During its next stage, which lasted from 1919 into 1920, the White armies—located in the outer portions of the empire—marched from their various locales toward Moscow and Petrograd. The White armies were led, respectively, by Kolchak in the east; General Anton Denikin in the south; General Nikolai Yudenich in the Baltic region; and Baron Pyotr Wrangel, who succeeded Denikin in the south. The single greatest threat that the Communists faced was the possibility that these amply supplied White armies might unite into a single military force and jointly destroy the Revolution.

In the south the so-called Volunteer Army (which had been pieced together in the winter of 1917–18 in the Don Cossack region) was headquartered at Novocherkassk, near the Sea of Azov, whose supply ports were accessible to the Black Sea. The Don Cossacks detested the Communists, and on 20 November 1917, their assembly declared the region's independence from the soviet regime. The architect of the Volunteer Army, however, was the short-lived, cancer-ridden General Mikhail Alexeev, who had formerly been chief of staff of the tsar's army and supreme commander under Kerensky. On 15 December Alexeev helped the Cossack chieftain, Hetman Alexey Kaledin, recapture Rostov from the Reds and placed himself and his still-small Volunteer Army in the service of Kornilov, who had escaped from prison and made his way to the Don region, together with a group of reactionary officers.

In February 1918, however, the Red Army overran the Don area, including Novocherkassk and Rostov. Fleeing the Red advance, Kornilov took his force of around 4000 men southward over the icy wastes of the eastern Don region into the almost empty but safe Kuban steppes, a journey that lasted 80 days. Kornilov himself never made it to the Kuban; he was killed during a futile attack on Ekaterinodar (10–13 April 1918). Still, the 'Ice March'—and the hallowed memory of Kornilov—catalyzed the Volunteers into mobilizing themselves and coalescing into a major White movement.

Thereafter the Volunteer Army fell under the command of General Anton Denikin, whom the Allies regarded as the authentic leader in the south. Denikin built up his Volunteer Army with a formidable supply of mostly British armaments. Between March and September 1918 he is alleged to have received as many as 7000 machine guns, a thousand field guns, a quarter of a million rifles, hundreds of millions of cartridges, 200 airplanes, and a hundred tanks. But he was able to rally very few troops; the Allies' small deployments of war-weary soldiers were insufficient to give Denikin's army a serious chance to win.

On the Eastern Front, in March 1919, Kolchak began his own march toward distant Moscow with an army of 100,000 men. His huge mobilization advanced rapidly, pushing close to Samara and Kazan. Then, in late April 1919, his forces were stopped by a Red counter-offensive led by Mikhail Frunze—incredibly, an ordinary Communist worker who had virtually no military experience. Frunze and the region's Communists had mobilized a powerful and ideologically committed force, stiffened by zealous Young Communists and other supporters of the Communist cause. On 28 April the worker-commander attacked Kolchak's troops. To the astonishment of Kolchak's Allied admirers and suppliers, the White army, despite its massive resources, began to retreat. At one point, to be sure, the Whites launched a counter-attack and fought furiously, even stopping Red forces for a time, but on 14 October Frunze and the brilliant Red commander Mikhail Tukhachevsky forced Kolchak into a strategic retreat. The White offensive collapsed, mainly as a result of its failure to gain mass popular support.

The Reds retook the Ural cities, and by November 1919 Kolchak's army—now only 15,000 strong—had turned into a rabble. Panicked, they fled toward Omsk, overly burdened with loot, even furniture, not to speak of mistresses. The Cossack forces among them split off into marauding bands that pillaged the countryside, massacring Jews and raping women. Even considering the Whites' egregious proclivity for plundering and killing, Kolchak's officers deserve the palm for unconscionable corruption, enriching themselves by selling military supplies on the black market, living in high style, and loitering at the rear of their troops at cafés and luxurious hotels—while the conscripts

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were sent into battle ill-fed and clothed in rags. In January 1920 Kolchak was handed over to the Reds in Irkutsk, where they tried and executed him. But before he was taken, he bestowed the title of 'supreme commander' on Denikin, the southern White leader, who now became the nominal head of all the major White forces.

Meanwhile in Rostov in mid-May 1919, Denikin had used a large, well-equipped force to sweep northward into the Donbass region and into south-eastern Ukraine. By late June his Volunteer Army had captured Karkhov and Ekaterinoslav. White rule in the Ukraine was exceptionally reactionary: Denikin suppressed Ukrainian nationalism in favor of Great Russian chauvinism; he banned the use of the Ukrainian language from all state institutions and returned worker-controlled factories to their owners and expropriated lands to their former landlords. His rule was marked by frequent atrocities: the towns and cities under his control were drenched with the blood of Jews and of workers who failed to fulfill White quotas for coal and other materials. The flourishing black market that followed in the wake of the White armies was constantly replenished by huge quantities of Allied supplies, which every White soldier and officer sold for personal gain. When the Allies became aware that the resources they supplied were being put up for sale, they cut off the supplies; the Whites thereafter simply looted the local populace. Ukrainians loathed Denikin's rule, with the result that he and his supporters were attacked by partisans of the Ukrainian anarchist chieftain, Nestor Makhno, and by those of the Ukrainian nationalist Simon Petliura, as well as lesser local partisan bands.²

In the meantime Denikin continued to drive northwest toward Moscow. With artillery, airplanes, tanks (manned by British soldiers), and a sufficiency of small arms and munitions, he pushed on until, on 31 August, his troops occupied Kiev. With more than 100,000 men, nearly 60,000 cavalry, and more than 500 artillery pieces, the Volunteer Army pushed northward toward Kursk. His advance brought him within striking distance of Orel, only 250 miles from Moscow. On 20 October, Denikin took Kursk and ordered his army to advance on the old Russian capital.

The Reds, however, with 200,000 troops in the southern front, now significantly outnumbered Denikin's 100,000 Whites, especially since Trotsky had allowed many peasant deserters to return to the ranks—which they were willing to do if only to defend their farmland against the Whites. Led by elite Latvian brigades, the Red Army sliced through the Volunteer Army's lines, threatening to cut off its supply route to the Black Sea ports. The Whites, once again significantly overextended, were forced to abandon Orel. Precisely at this time Semen Budenny's Red Cavalry tore into the Don Cossacks on Denikin's left flank, sending the horsemen reeling toward Voronezh and threatening to

separate Denikin's army from the Don region itself. Neither the Reds nor the Whites gave any quarter: both sides freely tortured and shot captives as well as civilians.

Once the Red Army recaptured Orel on 20 October, the Volunteer Army retreated southward. As it neared the Black Sea, the retreat turned into a rout, pursued mainly by Makhno's ostensibly anarchist partisans and Petliura's nationalists. The British, pressed by their angry domestic labor movement, which threatened to call a general strike in support of the soviets, now ceased to support the Whites. The often-hysterical Whites thought only of escape, often fighting one another to board the trains to Novorossiysk, then, in May 1920, pouring into that port in the hope of finding a place on Allied ships. Denikin's chosen associates—Russian notables, and the still effective troops at his disposal—were permitted to board the ships, but the rest of his followers were left on the quays to the mercy of the unforgiving Reds. The ships sailed off, taking Denikin's favored few to Constantinople and exile.

Outraged by this and countless earlier malfeasances, Denikin's own staff forced him to resign. He was replaced by Baron Pyotr Wrangel, a more competent officer, who took over what was left of the Volunteer Army. Wrangel's commanders made a last but hopeless effort to establish a White stronghold in the Crimea. Although the baron showed more wisdom in his relationship with the population than Denikin, he was leading a doomed fight. In October 1920, after some ten months, strong Communist forces were thrown against his army, and he was forced to evacuate the peninsula. Wrangel's defeat in April 1920 marked the definitive end of the so-called 'White Tide'. A few guerrilla bands remained in other parts of Russia, but they were soon wiped out.

The one notable White campaign that remains to be mentioned was the campaign of General Nikolai Yudenich, who in October 1919, while Denikin was advancing northward toward Orel, tried to seize Petrograd from his base in the Baltic states. Yudenich crossed from Estonia into Soviet Russia and by 20 October pushed a poorly organized Red Army back to the Pulkovo Heights outside Petrograd. With strong British naval and air support, the White general's 14,000 troops (equipped with 50,000 rifles) seemed to constitute a serious menace to Communist rule. The Red troops were panicked by his tanks and airplanes; Zinoviev, Petrograd's party boss, underwent a panic attack, which spread fear like a contagion to many of his subordinates. The Reds fell back so rapidly that many Communist leaders, even Lenin, viewed the fall of Petrograd as unavoidable.

In reality, the Red Army had a very strong numerical superiority over the Whites, and Trotsky flatly refused to accept Lenin's suggestion that the city be evacuated. Rushing from another front to the former capital, he arrived in

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Petrograd on 16 October and instantly began to prepare the city for a house-to-house resistance against Yudenich's forces. Barricades were built in the city's streets, key apartment houses were strongly fortified, and armored vehicles were manufactured at the Putilov works. The Red troops were stiffened by thousands of committed Communists, including the indefatigable Kronstadt sailors.

Finally, when the Red troops began to retreat in panic from Yudenich's menacing tanks, Trotsky personally rode on horseback into their midst, rallying them with rousing commands and the example of his personal courage. Yudenich's army, which was anything but solid in its own commitment to the White cause and had been steadily melting away, fell back and surrendered the field to the Reds. Their retreat did not end until Yudenich and what remained of his army crossed the border into Estonia.

The remaining White forces, which were decomposing into scattered bands, were mopped up by the Reds in only a matter of weeks. Some larger forces consisted of mere adventurers, such as Nikofor Grigorev, a former tsarist officer who switched sides as need arose, aligning himself first with Petliura, and then with the Communists. He finally turned against the Red forces and spent much of his remaining time looting while wearing the mantle of a Ukrainian liberator. In May 1919, this obvious opportunist perpetrated some of the most horrendous massacres of defenseless Jews in the Ukraine. Nearly 150 pogroms were attributed to Grigorev and his bands, until Makhno finally killed him in July 1919.

Attached or unattached Terek, Don, Kuban, and Ussuri Cossack bands were to be found almost everywhere in Russia, fighting for the Whites—and, in a number of cases, even for the Reds. Especially in 1919–20 in the Ukraine they persistently looted civilians and, together with Ukrainian nationalists, conducted deadly pogroms against the Jews. Even Budenny's Red Cavalry included Cossacks—the 'Red Cossacks', as they were called—who engaged in pogroms despite Communist attempts to outlaw anti-Semitic behavior and propaganda, although the Communists seldom took punitive action against 'Red' pogromists. The often-repeated cry 'Save Russia and kill the Jews!' was so deeply embedded in the Russian mind, no less among workers and peasants than among Whites and tsarists, that brutal anti-Semitic rampages were discreetly tolerated on both sides. In fact, estimates place the total number of Jews slaughtered during the civil war at close to 200,000 men, women and children.

DEVASTATING EFFECTS OF THE CIVIL WAR

The civil war continued into a third stage, in which the Communists fought the 'Green' peasant rebellion, which we will examine in Chapter 52. For now it should be said that the government's war against the peasants was brutal, destabilizing and self-destructive. Few, if any, Bolshevik leaders in 1917 had sincerely believed in the *narodnik* agrarian program that they had borrowed from the Left SRs, and they were eager to discard it as soon as they could. The opportunity came as famine hit Russian cities in the winter of 1917–18. The system for supplying the cities with food had broken down, as a result of the loss of Ukrainian grain and because the Bolsheviks had abolished private trade between town and country. Meanwhile, urban industry collapsed, which meant that cities were no longer producing manufactured goods that rural dwellers wished to obtain. Having no reason to trade, the peasants withheld the grain from the cities, producing what the Bolsheviks called a 'scissors crisis'.

war against peasantry
The Bolsheviks solved the problem by force. Beginning in May 1918, they dispatched squads of armed workers to the countryside for the express purpose of confiscating grain from the peasants, especially the better-off kulaks, whom they accused of hoarding. The act of selling grain became a criminal offense. Peasants were ordered to supply the squads with target amounts of grain. Food requisition squads, aided by Red Guards and even merciless Chekist troops, went to work to expropriate grain from the countryside—indeed, methodically to pillage it. When a peasant household lacked sufficient grain to meet its target, the squad would search the premises and seize even the next season's planting seeds. Suspected kulaks were summarily executed. Whole villages that failed to fill requisition quotas were designated as 'hoarders' and their members subjected to mass whippings (a method employed by the tsarist Cossacks). In June the regime set up 'committees of the poor' (*kombedy*)—or groups of poor, landless peasants—to help the requisition squads confiscate grain from ostensibly rich kulaks. The poor peasants, in effect, were induced to expropriate food from their better-off fellow villagers.

The government dignified this system of outright plunder with the name 'war communism' and continued it through most of the civil war. But even as the Communists alleged that it portended the emergence of a truly Communist society, it amounted to little more than a war against the peasantry itself.

deaths
The costs of the civil war were staggering. Between January 1918 and July 1920 more than 7 million people died from food shortages and disease alone, quite apart from military casualties. All told, the conflict claimed an estimated 10 million lives from combat, disease, and famine. It left the Russian economy in debris, fulfilling the Mensheviks' direst pre-war predictions. The country's

overall industrial and agricultural output fell to roughly one-fifth of its 1913 level, and the transportation and factory systems were in ruins. The famine that swept over Russia in 1920–21 reduced peasants and urban dwellers alike to starvation and, in the countryside, even to cannibalism. *famine*

At the same time the civil war stripped Russia of its richly textured civil society, leaving the social landscape barren. Needless to say, the nobility, traditional military strata, bourgeoisie, middle classes, and old bureaucracy disappeared; but so did the cooperatives, guilds, peasant unions, *zemstva*, and the like. Russia's liberal and revolutionary culture went by the board, not to speak of popular institutions like factory and shop committees, trade unions, and professional organizations. Most definitively, the Communists' response to the war divested the Russian Revolution of its humanistic intentions and its emancipatory features. The possibilities of a 'Commune state', workers' control of industry, a democratic political structure, a free federation of nationalities, a popular militia, and freedom of expression were jettisoned. The soviets survived only as passive instruments of the Communist Party.

Russia's barren social landscape was eventually filled by hierarchical structures necessary for waging war: the Red Army, the ubiquitous and centralized Communist Party, the Cheka, and a multitude of large and small bureaucratic commissariats. As early as 1919 the party itself—as a result of internal discipline, centralization, and Cheka intervention in political disputes—had evolved into a mass institution, dedicated to prosecuting the civil war, and a one-party state dedicated to assuring Communist control of Russia. Once seen as temporary, this transformation was eventually accepted as a permanent outcome of Bolshevik dogma and the degeneration of the Revolution itself. *f*

Moreover, the Communists who emerged from the civil war were no longer the same people, psychologically and politically, as the idealists who had joined the party before and during 1917. The civil war profoundly hardened them. The atrocities committed during the Red Terror; the heightened cruelties that needlessly worsened battles and famines; the genocidal tendencies of White commanders against Jews and their slaughter of captured Communist Party members, often with the support of right-wing SRs—all immensely eroded the moral fiber of the Revolution. Both sides in the Russian civil war committed moral as well as physical and political atrocities after as well as during battles. The conflict had brutalized nearly everyone who fought in it, regardless of their place on the political spectrum—not only Lenin but also Tseretelli, and not only Trotsky but also Chkheidze.

But in 1922, when Communist power was secure, the party was finally in a position to introduce a freer atmosphere. But in reality it did the very opposite. It suppressed its critics even more ruthlessly than it had in the heat of

domestic conflict. No governmental agency epitomized this transformation more than the Cheka. Initially intended, as we have seen, to be a temporary or 'extraordinary' institution whose function was to stamp out anti-soviet military conspirators, terrorists, and saboteurs, the Cheka during the civil war proliferated throughout Communist-controlled areas, establishing its own branches, special military forces, and a vast network of agents who terrorized even remote villages and districts. It would be no overstatement to say that under a variety of different names it eventually became the main cudgel of the totalitarian state.

Nonetheless, the Communist Party's turn toward totalitarianism did not occur entirely as a result of the brutalization produced by the civil war. Personality also played a role in the creation of a ubiquitous and repressive government. The official declaration of the Red Terror in September 1918, for example, was largely caused by Fanny Kaplan's attempt to assassinate Lenin. Lenin, to be sure, had long fostered a mentality of sternness and ruthlessness, which the brutality of the civil war greatly reinforced. The assassination attempt, however, inflicted a psychological wound from which the Communist leader never recovered. During the Red Terror Lenin, in fact, went out of his way to praise the work of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the Cheka chief.

Following the attempt on his life, Lenin's limited popularity was vastly enhanced throughout Russia, including its most remote reaches. Russian peasants made him an object of veneration, even regarding him as their new tsar. However much Lenin professed to eschew personality cults, power increasingly came to be identified with his own person. Despite his expressed indifference to such reactions, as far back as his *Iskra* days he had subtly cultivated his own high standing by designating himself as *starik* (the old man). Communists generally came to regard him as a fount of infallible wisdom and, especially after his death, as the physical embodiment of Marxism reduced to a quasi-religious dogma.

Bolshevism, in Lenin's person, had mutated from an arguable Marxist theory of revolution into an iconic ideology of social redemption. With the Cheka as its most important inquisitory instrument, the Communist state became dangerously messianic in its influence. Although the October Revolution had opened the existential vista of world revolution, the practices of the Russian Communists, partly the result of wartime exigencies but partly also the result of ideological dogmatism, stained the socialist ideal indelibly with bloodshed and tyranny.

NOTES

1. Quoted in W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 100.
2. For more on Makhno's activities, see Chapter 52.

CHAPTER 51 Bolsheviks Against the Proletariat

A WORKERS' PARTY IN A PEASANT COUNTRY

Notwithstanding 'war communism' and the devastation wrought in its name, the Russian peasantry emerged from the civil war very much intact, if not greatly strengthened. Contrary to conventional socialist opinion at the time, the land seizures that peasants had undertaken since the February Revolution had led to a remarkable growth in the traditional village commune. Amid the social chaos and destruction that prevailed during the civil war, the *obshchina* became for many peasants a source of collective support—such that even 'separators', those who had previously split off from the commune, now returned to seek safety in numbers. By the end of the civil war village collectivism had actually increased as a proportion of the Russian agricultural economy. To the Communists, this unanticipated outcome stood stunningly at odds with the dogmatic Marxist conception of a historically progressive revolution. The basic desire of this Russian peasantry—the preservation of the village commune—was in fact wholly antithetical to Marxist ideas.

The very notion of a proletarian revolution in Russia, however, was no less antithetical to conventional Marxism (as distinguished from the ideas of Marx himself). Russia was still a largely peasant country in 1917. Given the objective conditions that existed in post-revolutionary Russia, a viable economic program for the country would have been something like a combination of *narodism* and syndicalism. In the countryside the encouragement and support for land repartition based on the *obshchina* might well have preserved the gains that the peasantry had made; while in the factories a stable industrial democracy based on workers' control, co-ordinated by trade unions, would have preserved the basis for a socialist society in the cities. This plausible

program, however, stood markedly at odds with Marxist dogma. Lenin, riddled with pragmatic bourgeois ideas, thought mainly in terms of one-man management of factories and large state-controlled farms that would be managed like mechanized industrial enterprises. As Alexander Shliapnikov, the first worker-Bolshevik commissar of labor, was ironically to recall, his party became 'the vanguard of a non-existent class.'¹ In the absence of a viable proletariat, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' palpably became a fiction.

Lacking a numerically large industrial proletariat and isolated amid a massive traditional peasantry, the urbanized Communist leaders—who had been Europeanized by their long exile outside Russia—found themselves sharply pitted against the majority of the population in the country they ruled. It was not the peasantry alone that objected to their policies; it was the workers as well. The civil war took a far greater toll on the workers—in whose name the victorious Communists had fought—than on the peasants. The dearth of raw materials and power shut down the factories in which they worked; indeed, between 1918 and 1920 Petrograd lost three-quarters of its population, mainly skilled workers, to famine and conscription. At major factory centers that once provided key Bolshevik support, such as the New Lessner and the Erikson plants, the workforce declined from 7000 each to perhaps 200 between them. As for Moscow, approximately three-quarters of the population fled to their plots in the countryside.

Even under these conditions, many factories run by committees (in the system of workers' control legitimized by the decree of 3 November 1917) acted co-operatively, coming to the aid of workers in similar enterprises, sharing not only food but fuel, raw materials, and even semi-finished goods and finished products in a remarkable spirit of class solidarity. As goods became more scarce, however, and economic conditions worsened, all too many committee-run factories were obliged to hoard raw materials and compete with one another. Hungry workers performed shoddy work and spent their workdays surreptitiously making goods that they could barter on the black market in order to obtain the bare necessities of life. Commonly they used the huge leather belts that turned machines' wheels to make boots and shoes for personal use or sale. The theft of tools and materials was ubiquitous. In time, large segments of Russian industry became all but useless, leading to the widespread erosion of Russia's industrial plant.

That many workers behaved like self-interested capitalists once they obtained control of their factories should not be surprising; under conditions of material scarcity, they were obliged to satisfy their own and their families' compelling needs. Communist poster art of workers striking heroic postures deceived no one, least of all the workers themselves. The Russian masses had never known anything but economic scarcity, and war and revolution had

undermined their meager material base disastrously. Nor did they have an adequate idea of how to co-ordinate their factory committees on a scale necessary for running the relatively complex Russian economy. Many Russian workers had little understanding of the operations of the modern factory, let alone economic planning and co-ordination; others, recent arrivals from villages, were unfamiliar with modern industrial practices altogether. Under all these circumstances, it is doubtful that workers' control could have been very successful in Russia in 1917, even if it had been given free rein.

But the Communists did not give it free rein. Scarcely had the 3 November decree been promulgated than Lenin began to turn against the factory committees in principle as well as for pragmatic reasons. In January 1918 he argued vigorously that the factory committees had wrongly understood 'workers' control' to mean that workers in each individual factory would enjoy complete control over their individual plant. Factories under committee management, he wrote, stating the obvious, were not creating socialism but were competing with one another, indeed operating more like capitalist enterprises than socialist ones. What Lenin feared most, in fact, was that the factory committees would generate workers' organizations that existed independently of the party, outside its control—and hence would constitute a potential threat to the party's exclusive authority.

A new system of trade unions was needed, he argued, one organized industrially rather than on an individual-factory basis. Trade unions could implement greater co-ordination and more effective administration; under their guidance, workers could be induced to give up control of the factories and accept trade union sovereignty. At the First All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions (7–14 January 1918) a Bolshevik 'Resolution on Workers' Control' was adopted that radically redefined the function of trade unions in the soviet economy. In a dizzying example of pure sophistry, Lenin contended that the new state was already a 'workers' and peasants' state'—hence workers were no longer in need of organizations to work on their behalf. In short, the workers already enjoyed complete power over the economy through the state; hence the primary responsibility of the trade unions was to 'become instruments of the state authority and as such ... work in coordination with other instruments of the socialist state for the realization of new principles in the organization of economic life.'² As for the factory committees, they 'must become the local branches of the corresponding trade unions'³—that is to say, subordinate themselves to the trade union bureaucracy.

Another Bolshevik resolution, this one adopted by the Fourth Conference of Trade Unions (12–17 March 1918), declared that trade unions were expected to give up their adversarial position in relation to management and change 'from purely fighting organizations to more and more economically productive

associations of the proletariat.⁴ It was still impossible in 1918 to enforce this utterly bizarre resolution, which denied the need for any organization that was committed to the defense of workers' rights, but it paved the way for the transformation of trade unions into government-controlled spearheads for achieving higher (or more exploitative) production levels in the factories.

The new trade unions were created, and the factory committees were subordinated to them with relative ease. Lenin was patently ready to borrow all bourgeois methods to place the proletariat under authoritarian control and even celebrated bourgeois methods of labor exploitation. In 'The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government', published in *Pravda* on 28 April 1918, he advanced an appropriate 'socialist' style of factory management: one-man management, or economic 'dictatorships', as he frankly called them. Henceforth single managers were expected to make all decisions about the structure of factories and the production process they followed. Factory committees were to be demoted to the function of enforcing labor discipline, and trade unions were forbidden to 'interfere directly in the management of undertakings.' Instead they were to carry out the strictures of one-man management as 'components of the apparatus of the Soviet state.'⁵ Strict systems of accounting and administrative control were necessary in production, Lenin argued; accordingly the Taylor system should be introduced in order to intensify and quantify the labor process. He made a case not only for a one-man dictatorship in the factories but for a one-party dictatorship in the state:

That in the history of revolutionary movements, the dictatorship of individuals was very often the expression, the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of the revolutionary classes has been shown by the irrefutable experience of history. . . . There is . . . absolutely *no* contradiction between Soviet (*that is*, socialist) democracy and the exercise of dictatorial powers by individuals.⁶

This was a remarkable confession of Lenin's authoritarian proclivities. Not only ordinary workers but also trade union officials resisted this grotesque perversion of socialist ideals from the moment it was proposed; but their favored alternative was a proposal for management by a board or *collegia*, in which they, together with technicians and administrators, would have an influence—a modest enough demand—on economic life. Thereafter for two years trade union officials were able to prevent Lenin's proposal from being accepted at party congresses. Indeed, as late as January 1920, at a trade union conference, the proposal was again turned down.

Nonetheless, a new bureaucracy was saddling itself on Russian industry. On 23 April 1918, the Sovnarkom nationalized internal trade, placing the

market in the hands of the state. This was followed by a decree on 28 June that nationalized all large industrial enterprises. On 2 November a massive tax of 10 billion rubles was levied on all propertied classes in the cities and villages, expropriating and economically obliterating whatever the government decided to call the 'bourgeoisie' and 'nobility'. An immense commissariat, larger than the tsarist bureaucracy, invaded even remote towns and villages, as well as the army, civil service, and educational system, essentially placing all aspects of economic and social life under government surveillance.

The workers did not take these changes passively. Starting in early 1918 the Petrograd workers created a serious opposition to the Bolsheviks. In May and June an independent Workers' Assembly of Plenipotentiaries (or Delegates) led a number of important political strikes to protest against anti-democratic practices in soviet elections, notably the ban on individual exchanges of produce between town and village; grain confiscations by the Red Guards in the countryside; inequality of food rations between workers and Red Army soldiers; and the personal privileges accorded to party members and commissars. The workers who carried out these strikes were often those who had carried through the October Revolution a few months earlier and whom Communist propaganda continued to depict as its principal supporters. According to Vladimir Brovkin:

Strikes affected the largest, primarily metal industry, enterprises: metallurgical, locomotive, and armaments plants. The myth that metalworkers were the backbone of Bolshevik support during the civil war has to be finally cast aside. If anything metalworkers were the main force in anti-Bolshevik strikes.⁷

The Communists, in fact, met these strikes with savage repression. The Workers' Assembly was banned, and the Cheka arrested its leaders. In June 1918, when workers went on strike at the Obukhov plant (once a Bolshevik stronghold), the Communists first locked them out, then shut the plant down completely and fired the workers. Afterward the workers sounded an alarm:

We are strangled by hunger. We are mangled by unemployment. Our children are dropping from lack of food. Our press has been crushed. Our organizations have been destroyed. The freedom to strike has been abolished. And when we raise our voices in protest, they shoot us or throw us out, as they did with the Obukhov comrades. Russia has again been turned into a tsarist dungeon.⁸

Workers in other industrial cities joined the fight. On 2 July workers in Yar-

osavl, Tula, and Nizhny Novgorod worked with their Petrograd fellows in organizing a general strike. About 80,000 workers heeded the strike call, but despite this large turnout, the strikers failed to extract any concessions from the Communists. On the contrary, the Communists showed themselves to be impervious to the pressures of strikes. Calling the strike 'counter-revolutionary', the government denounced its organizers as 'White Guards' and forcibly repressed it. Further protests led to even more repression. Finally in the autumn, after the onset of the Red Terror, workers who tried to organize against the regime were arrested or, in unknown numbers, executed.

In March 1919, during the period when the socialist opposition parties were briefly legalized and their press freedom temporarily restored, Petrograd was again swept by a wave of strikes. On 2 March, Zinoviev tried to address the workers in the once pro-Bolshevik Erikson plant, but the workers uncere- moniously drove him off the podium. Sparked by mass arrests of Left SRs (whose party had just left the government over the Brest-Litovsk treaty), strikes broke out in plants that had recently been indispensable supports for the Communists. At length the Putilov workers, in a protest rally on 10 March, adopted a remarkable resolution:

We, the workmen of the Putilov works and the wharf, declare before the laboring classes of Russia and the world, that the Bolshevik government has betrayed the high ideals of the October revolution, and thus betrayed and deceived the workmen and peasants of Russia; that the Bolshevik govern- ment, acting in our name, is not the authority of the proletariat and peas- ants, but the authority of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, self-governing with the aid of Extraordinary Commissions [Chekas], Com- munists and police.

We protest against the compulsion of workmen to remain at factories and works, and attempts to deprive them of all elementary rights: freedom of the press, speech, meetings, and inviolability of person.

This extraordinary resolution, by workers in what was once the capital's proletarian *sanctum sanctorum*, made seven political demands:

1. Immediate transfer of authority to freely elected Workers' and Peasants' Soviets.
2. Immediate re-establishment of freedom of elections at factories and plants, barracks, ships, railways, everywhere.
3. Transfer of entire management to the released workers of the trade unions.
4. Transfer of food supply to workers' and peasants' cooperative societies.

5. General arming of workers and peasants.
6. Immediate release of members of the original revolutionary peasants' party of Left Socialist Revolutionaries.
7. Immediate release [from prison] of [Left SR leader] Maria Spiridonova.⁹

Of the 10,000 present at the rally, only 22 opposed the resolution. A few days later, in mid-March, workers at the Putilov and fourteen other large plants in Petrograd went on strike in support of the resolution. They included most of the metalworkers in the city—railcar builders and machine builders—as well as electrical, textile and chemical workers, totaling 50 per cent of the Petrograd labor force. Indeed, in preparation for the coming struggle, the workers even erected barricades at the factories.

But the Communists responded ruthlessly. Labeling the strike a Left SR insurrection, the government stormed the Putilov with 18,000 troops equipped with 250 machine guns. Anyone found carrying a weapon was summarily shot. Zinoviev personally ordered the execution of 200 workers. These punitive measures all but silenced the Petrograd and Moscow workers. In the provinces general strikes broke out in Tver, Tula, Bryansk and Astrakhan, all of which called for free elections to the soviets (or for convening a constituent assembly) and the release of political prisoners. But these movements too were repressed with extreme violence; as Brovkin observes, 'The Bolsheviks were getting used to applying military solutions to social and political problems.'¹⁰

In December 1919, Trotsky made an explicitly authoritarian proposal to apply a military solution to Russia's economic problems. Giddy with his military success against the White armies and persuaded of the virtues of extreme military centralization, the commissar of war turned his attention to civilian problems and proposed that the Russian workforce be militarized outright. Martial law should be imposed throughout the economy, and the Russian workforce should be organized into an industrial army. The workforce was to be commanded by a centralized quasi-military authority, an industrial officer corps. According to his adulatory biographer Isaac Deutscher:

He proposed that the machinery for military mobilization should be employed for the mobilization of civilian labour. . . . Its detachments were to be organized on the basis of productive units. On the other hand, civilian labour was to be subjected to military discipline; and the military administration was to supply manpower to industrial units.¹¹

Militarizing the Russian working class, however, would be tantamount to conscription. Workers would be subjected to compulsion and punishment, as were Red Army soldiers, moved at will by the state, and court-martialed for

infractions. This proposal put 'war communism' on a permanent and comprehensive military footing, not as a set of temporary and extraordinary measures. It would become a normal condition for a presumably collectivist society, indeed the fulfillment of the logic of 'war communism'—a barracks communism. When Trotsky—joined by Lenin—presented the militarization of labor to a trade union conference on 12 January 1920, almost everyone in attendance rejected the plan. Aware that the policy was not workable on a broad scale, Trotsky tried to institute it partially and experimentally, in a few areas, transforming a number of military units into industrial armies. On 15 January he mobilized Red Army units that had defeated Kolchak in the Urals into the First Revolutionary Labor Army and put them to work on so-called economic 'fronts' in fields, forests and mines. In the end, however, Trotsky was obliged to abandon the program because of intense working-class resistance.

By comparison, Lenin's proposal for one-man management seemed to the party comparatively reasonable. At its Ninth Congress in March 1920, the Communist delegates finally passed the resolution. Thereafter party leaders tried to soften trade union hostility with promises that union officials could function as assistants to the 'specialist' managers, whereupon one-man management was introduced throughout most of the economy, from the large-scale directorates that governed the various industrial sectors, to the individual factories. Non-proletarian 'specialists' were given ever-greater positions of responsibility, while workers played a diminishing role in factory affairs. By November 1920, Lenin's system of factory 'dictatorships' existed in four-fifths of all large enterprises. By now it would require the utmost sophistry to argue that the Communist-controlled government was a 'workers' state'.

THE LEFT SRS

Unlike the Marxists, who believed that a socialist agriculture must be industrial in its structure and operations, the Left SRs, as revolutionary *narodniki*, understood that Russian peasants were generally supporters of a traditional ideal of egalitarianism and mutual aid. Their party had emerged from a split with the PSR in mid-1917. The Left SRs were led by the young theorist Boris Kamkov and by the venerable Mark Natanson, whose long *narodnik* career dated from the previous century. Natanson, an ardent revolutionary, had bitterly opposed the world war, held vehemently revolutionary views, and flatly rejected PSR participation in the various coalition governments.

The Left SRs' most popular leader, however, was Maria Spiridonova, who

had entered the populist movement at the age of 21, at the turn of the century, and seemed to embody all the self-sacrificing dedication that had marked the *narodniki* from their inception. In January 1906, horrified by the brutality committed by a certain general against the peasants of her native Tambov, she had assassinated him. Her bold act, and the abuses to which the police and Cossacks subjected her afterward, aroused such strong public sympathy that at stops on her journey into Siberian exile, crowds greeted her reverently, much as if she were a living saint.

Following the February Revolution Spiridonova was freed from exile and traveled to Petrograd, where she joined Natanson and Kamkov in joint opposition to Chernov's conciliatory behavior toward the bourgeoisie, especially his acceptance of a portfolio in the Provisional Government. At a PSR party congress in May 1917, these populist radicals subjected Chernov to bitter criticism for having 'garbled and mutilated our party programme';¹² and they advanced their own program calling for the outright seizure of the land by peasant communes, workers' control of industry, an all-socialist government, and an immediate peace. No revolutionary program was more suitable for Russia at this time. Accordingly, as the months passed, the party's Left grew and even gained majorities at PSR conferences at a dizzying pace.

The Left SRs had first openly revolted against the PSR during the Pre-Parliament, when they refused to vote in favor of the war and decamped from the party in a single unified body. In the weeks preceding the October Revolution the Left SRs and the Bolsheviks, ostensibly sharing a similar program, steadily drew closer together. In fact, the Military Revolutionary Committee, as we have seen, was initially headed by a young Left SR, and many of its most active members were also Left SRs. Immediately upon taking power the Bolsheviks cannily appropriated the Left SRs' land decree, abolishing private ownership of land and calling upon the peasants to redistribute the landowners' property communally along lines akin to the *chernyi peredel*. The Bolsheviks' temporary adoption of the Left SR orientation, together with Left SR votes, played a decisive role in winning the peasantry to the soviet regime.

At the Second Congress of Soviets, when the official SR and Menshevik delegates walked out to protest against the Bolshevik coup, the Left SRs remained in the hall. Not unexpectedly, the PSR thereupon expelled them from the party, after which they formally established their own party. As we have seen, after initially rejecting the Bolsheviks' offer to share power in a two-party coalition soviet government, they decided to share the power with the Bolsheviks on 17 December. This coalition proved shaky, especially when Lenin and his supporters began to shed their libertarian ideas in favor of a crude bourgeois pragmatism.

It did not take long for major quarrels to break out between the two parties.

Firmly committed to soviet democracy, the Left SRs vigorously supported the legality of all socialist opposition parties and their presses. They vehemently condemned the arbitrary punitive decisions made by the Communists, particularly the use of capital punishment, which the new government had banned in word, albeit not in deed. In the Sovnarkom the Left SR commissar of justice, Isaac Steinberg, bitterly criticized the Cheka's arbitrary arrests, demanding an investigation of its behavior in February 1918. Nevertheless, other Left SRs did not hesitate to enter the Cheka and work zealously alongside Dzerzhinsky.

Although they themselves were often notoriously slipshod with respect to their principles, the Left SRs were particularly outraged by 'war communism' and the wholesale expropriation of peasant produce. These policies, the Left SRs saw quite clearly, would greatly worsen rather than ease the cities' food problems. By organizing 'committees of poor peasants' to confiscate the harvests of moderately well-off peasants, the Communists were igniting a savage class war among the peasants that was based on a specious interpretation of rural conditions; it was needlessly alienating the peasants from the soviet regime, often irrespective of their class status. Indeed, the 'committees of the poor' impelled the peasantry as a whole to view the Reds as new exploiters and, as we will see, create the last, bloody agrarian front against Communist power.

What nearly sundered the governing coalition between the Left SRs and the Communists, however, was the signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty. The Left SRs saw the treaty as a gross capitulation to imperialism and opposed it intransigently. They demanded, instead, that Soviet Russia continue its fight, invoking the tradition of the French revolutionaries in 1792, and conduct a revolutionary war against the advancing German army. When the Communists ratified the onerous treaty at the Fourth Congress of Soviets, the Left SR commissars angrily withdrew from the Sovnarkom, thereby abandoning the entire government to the Bolsheviks. (Spiridonova, as a 'party elder'—she was in her thirties—opposed the party's withdrawal from the Sovnarkom, but to no avail.) Although the Left SRs continued to participate in the Central Executive Committee of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, further Bolshevik capitulations to opportunistic policies widened the cleavage between the two parties. The Left SRs abhorred the ruthless suppression of soviet democracy, as well as Lenin's April 1918 proposal for one-man management of factories and stringent labor discipline. Moreover, they were appalled on 16 June, when the government officially restored the death penalty, only to exercise it shortly afterward.

Gradually the consequences of the Brest-Litovsk treaty soon became shockingly apparent. The 'shameful peace' had allowed the Germans to take over the Ukraine—and to subject millions of peasants to German occupation. Ukrainian peasants were obliged to provide 300 truckloads of grain to the

self for
 Germans daily. When they fell short of meeting this requirement, the Germans seized the grain by force. Not surprisingly, the outraged peasants rose in revolt, burning bridges, destroying railroad lines, and attacking German troops and army posts. In April, citing its inefficiency in collecting grain, the Germans overturned the relatively liberal Kiev government and installed a monarchist-landlord regime under their own puppet, Hetman Skoropadsky. Skoropadsky, a notorious reactionary, went on a bloody rampage, claiming the lives of thousands. Throughout all this fighting, the soviet government stood by and did nothing. So shocked were the Left SRs by the soviet government's inaction that, from their platform in the CEC, they demanded that the government officially abrogate the Brest-Litovsk treaty.

After the Communists refused, the Left SRs decided publicly to call for a revolutionary war against Germany at the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, which was scheduled to be held in the Moscow Opera House on 5 July. Had the Congress's delegates been elected democratically, it is generally believed, the Left SRs might well have had a majority of delegates. But the Left SR leaders were too immature to outfox the Bolsheviks as organizers—and too scrupulous morally to match Lenin's capacity to manufacture majorities once he had his hands on the levers of power. With 40 per cent of the vote, their hopes of winning a majority depended on persuading the Left Communists to break with their party and form a coalition with them. Addressing the delegates, both Kamkov and Spiridonova appealed for the abrogation of the treaty and for a revolutionary war against the Germans. Denouncing 'those who look spiritlessly on while German imperialists oppress the Ukraine peasants,' Kamkov asked: 'Do you believe that our peasants in soldiers' uniform are going to look on while their brothers are murdered before their eyes?' Then he exclaimed, 'Down with the murderers!' looking up at the box where Count Mirbach, the German ambassador to Russia, was seated as an observer. But their calls produced no positive response among the other delegates in the theater, and no reaction among the Left Communists. The Congress had been patently stacked against them. Even a Left SR-proposed resolution affirming the right of Ukrainian soviet delegates to be seated at the Congress was rejected. Lenin, following a disquisition on the soundness of his own policies, demagogically called for a crackdown on 'agents-provocateurs and hirelings of imperialism', unquestionably meaning the Left SRs.

self for
 Having failed to persuade the Congress, the Left SRs now turned to terror, the tactic with which they, as *narodniki*, were most familiar. The next day, on 6 July, while the Congress was still in session, two Left SR Cheka agents, Yakov Blyumkin and Nikolai Andreyev, entered the German embassy and assassinated Count Mirbach. Once the assassination was completed, the two men fled to the Cheka's Pokrovsky barracks for refuge. Dzerzhinsky personally

demanded that the assassins be delivered to him—threatening to shoot the entire Central Committee of the Left SRs if they were not surrendered—but his own troops took him prisoner and placed him under detention.

The Left SRs had made no plans for an uprising, but events were conspiring to turn the Pokrovsky barracks into an insurrectionary headquarters. For at least a day or so the military advantage lay with the Left SRs, who were reinforced by some 2000 soldiers and a number of Baltic sailors—all of them highly disciplined and well armed. The commanders of Left SR troops could easily have seized the Kremlin and taken Lenin hostage; it is conceivable that they might even have held Moscow long enough to rally enough sympathetic soldiers and workers to support a Left SR uprising and remove the Communists from power. Could have

Lenin, in turn, could count only on some 700 troops to defend his regime: the Lettish riflemen, commanded by Colonel I. Vatsetis. These troops, however, were detained in the outskirts of Moscow, and inclement weather prevented them from returning to the capital. As Vatsetis later recalled: 'Besides the Lettish riflemen, there were few military formations on whom the Bolshevik Party could rely. Hunger made the morale of the troops bad. Propaganda against the Bolsheviks had so much influence that the *Russian* regiments declared their neutrality. The mass of the Moscow workers maintained a neutral position too.'¹³

With no professional military forces on hand, the Communist government was decidedly at the mercy of the Left SRs. Lenin went into a rare panic and at midnight summoned Vatsetis to the Kremlin. 'Comrade, can we hold out till morning?' he asked. After surveying the scene for several hours, Vatsetis promised the Communist leader: 'We shall be in control of Moscow by about midday.'¹⁴ Vatsetis, as it turned out, made good his promise. He was finally able to bring his troops back to Moscow, and at five in the morning of 7 July they surrounded the Left SR troops and bombarded them with artillery until they finally surrendered. Dzerzhinsky had a dozen of them shot immediately and purged the Cheka of Left SRs.

Meanwhile, on 6 July, in a classical *narodnik* moral gesture, Spiridonova had returned to the Congress of Soviets to accept full responsibility for the assassinations, which in all likelihood she personally disapproved of. But the congress did not meet that day. She and the 450 other Left SR delegates waited in the hall through the night; then on the next day, after Lettish troops surrounded the building, they were taken into captivity. Moreover, the party's entire Central Committee was arrested. The defeat of the Left SRs was definitive: the party thereafter ceased to be a major force in the Russian Revolution.

Had the irresolute Left SR leaders shown the least strategic and organizational ability, they might well have succeeded in toppling the Communist

self prospects regime and dramatically changing the course of the Russian Revolution. In July 1918 the Russian masses may well have been ready for a Left SR government, and their *narodnik*-syndicalist program might have yielded a democratic soviet order that enjoyed wide popular support. The strikes in Petrograd and elsewhere showed that the workers' animosity toward the Communist regime was rising. The Left SRs, to be sure, would have had to accept the fact that most Russian peasants were not eager to wage a revolutionary war against the Germans; they wanted peace at almost any cost. The Left SRs would have also required a more disciplined and responsible political organization systematically to propagandize the workers and army regiments.

With a resolute organization, careful planning, and enough boldness to attack the Kremlin, the Left SRs might well have staged a third revolution in Russia. The Left SR Isaac Steinberg insisted that such a successful outcome was possible: 'If the [Left SR] Party had wished to overthrow the Communist government and seize political power for itself,' he wrote in retrospect, '... there is no doubt that at that time it would have had reasonable prospects of success.' But, he adds, 'the party was not concerned at that moment with seizing the apparatus of government; it was concerned with bringing about a radical alteration of Soviet policy.'¹⁵ As Orlando Figes remarks, the Left SRs

were much less interested in seizing power themselves than they were in calling for a popular uprising to force the Bolsheviks to change their policies. The Left SRs had no idea where this uprising would end up: they were happy to leave that to the 'revolutionary creativity of the masses.' They were the 'poets of the revolution' and, like all poets, were anarchists at heart. At every stage of their relationship with the Bolsheviks, the Left SRs had been outsmarted by them; and even now, when they had them at their mercy, they soon lost the upper hand.¹⁶

As 'anarchists of the heart', they fumbled a rare historic opportunity. Inexperienced with public life and accustomed mainly to protest, they were unprepared to provide institutional alternatives to the existing social order. Taken by surprise, the Left SR troops and sailors made virtually no effort to arrest Lenin, let alone take over the strategic points of Moscow. A number of them had occupied the Lubyanka prison and secret police office; others had taken the telegraph office and announced to the rest of the country that the Communists had been overthrown. But they did little else. Thus did the last action in Moscow that had any possibility of unseating the Communist regime, while still retaining the promise of Red October, come to its tragic end.

THE MOSCOW ANARCHISTS

The anarchists living in Russian cities cut an even more ineffectual figure than did the Left SRs. In March 1918, after the capital was moved from Petrograd to Moscow, the largest collection of the country's anarchist groups assembled in Moscow to form the Moscow Federation of Anarchist Groups. The Federation housed itself in the spacious Merchants' Club, which had been renamed the House of Anarchy in the spring of 1917. Most of its members professed to be anarcho-communists, and their main activity could loosely be called 'educational', spiced with bohemian lifestyle antics. The Federation's daily newspaper, *Anarkhia*, reflected a wide spectrum of contradictory anarchist and pseudo-anarchist views—individualist, Communist, more doubtfully syndicalist, and various composites thereof—who argued among themselves incessantly.

Initially the Bolsheviks, especially Kamenev, seemed quite conciliatory toward the anarchists; many of them had been allies of the party during the October Revolution. Like the Left SRs and the Left Communists, however, the anarchists were outraged by the Brest-Litovsk treaty, which they regarded as a surrender to German imperialism. Soviet Russia, they insisted, should form partisan bands, organized locally, and wage a guerrilla war against the German advance. To prepare for such warfare, the Federation began to organize assorted anarchist elements—some dedicated, some quasi-criminal—into units of armed urban guerrillas who designated themselves as Black Guards. Their authorized tasks were to propagandize and—amply equipped with rifles, pistols, and hand grenades—to 'requisition' private property, especially houses. They soon began to engage in widespread 'expropriations', ostensibly to finance the Federation's activities but often in reality for personal gain. This problem became so serious that on 16 March 1918, the Federation had publicly to condemn 'seizures for personal gain or for personal profit in general' and required Black Guards to get authorization before undertaking any expropriations.¹⁷

Such 'authorizations', however, were not always solicited, and the Communist-Left SR government felt that its erstwhile anarchist allies were imparting an unsavory reputation to the Revolution. On 9 April the anarchists gave the regime the excuse it needed to rid itself of anarchist clubs and periodicals in Moscow, when a group of Black Guards expropriated the car of an American representative of the Red Cross; in fact, the representative was actually a diplomatic contact sympathetic to the soviet regime. On the night of 11–12 April, Chekists raided 26 anarchist headquarters, most of which surrendered without a fight. But at least two—the House of Anarchy and the Donskoi Monastery—fought back so vigorously that a dozen Chekists and 40

anarchists were killed or wounded. Once the Cheka finally vanquished the resistance, it imprisoned more than 500 Moscow anarchists and shut down anarchist operations in Petrograd and the provincial cities as well.

During the summer of 1918, some of the Black Guards remaining in Moscow advocated 'seizing' the city.¹⁸ But as they discussed the prospects for such a plan among themselves, they realized the difficulties of trying to make a libertarian revolution in a time of great hunger. In one discussion two influential anarchists, Daniil Novomirsky and Alexy Borovoy, confessed, 'We would not know what to do about the famine. . . . Let it exhaust the Bolsheviks and lead the dictatorship of the Commissars to its grave. Then our hour will come!'¹⁹ What they would do even after the Bolsheviks were unseated is conspicuously unclear; Russian anarchists, like many of their compatriots abroad, were not given to long-range strategic thinking.

After abandoning plans to topple the Bolsheviks, the anarchists resorted to the tactic they knew best—terrorism. Anarchist-engineered bombings and expropriations took place sporadically in the following year. Incendiary leaflets recklessly called upon the 'people' to 'rise' (without saying where, how or when) and create a new 'commune' (by means unstated). In Rostov and Ekaterinoslav they invaded local jails, freed prisoners (many of whom were outright criminals), and caused general mayhem. The working class, however, was engaged in its own struggle with the Communists and gave them no perceptible notice. Finally on 15 September 1919, anarchists, in collusion with a number of Left SRs, dynamited the Communists' Moscow City Committee headquarters during a plenary meeting, killing twelve committee members and wounding 55 other Communists. This fatuous act became the pretext for severe Communist retribution: all suspected anarchist-terrorists were rounded up, and thereafter anarchists ceased to be a noticeable presence in Russian cities.

Kropotkin's death in February 1921 brought out an estimated 25,000 mourners in Moscow, marching to the gravesite under the black banner of anarchy. Clearly not all of these mourners were anarchists; more joined the demonstration to protest against Communist rule than to honor Kropotkin's memory. Nor were black flags symbolic of anarchy at a Russian funeral. Nonetheless, anarchists of all persuasions attended, and some anarchist prisoners were released from jail for a day in order to attend the patriarch's funeral. This funeral procession was to be the last public demonstration in which Communists tolerated denunciations of their regime. Anarchists who did not work with the Communists were thereafter arrested and were sent either to Siberia or into exile abroad, usually depending upon how many foreign visitors protested against their imprisonment. Others fled to the Ukraine, where they joined Nestor Makhno, the libertarian partisan leader. As

the civil war came to an end, the urban areas fell completely under the control of the Communists, and hopes for a third revolution to restore soviet democracy in the cities faded away.

The anarcho-syndicalists, by contrast, were made of sterner and more responsible stuff, but they returned from exile too late to exercise a major influence on the Revolution. Committed to organization, workers' control of the economy, and a modicum of centralization, they were forced to remain on the sidelines while the Bolsheviks pillaged their better ideas. In the end they were of little consequence in the events that followed the October Revolution and eventually became functionaries in the soviet government and trade unions or else fled abroad.

Lacking an effective movement, a coherent ideology, and a strategy for dealing with a determined state, anarchism simply faded away—except for the Ukrainian guerrilla forces in southern Russia led by Makhno, whose struggles with both the Whites and the Reds acquired legendary proportions.

THE WORKERS' OPPOSITION

As the civil war raged on for four years, the Communist Party remained a major arena of internal struggle as factions formed to protest against Lenin's new concept of trade unions and his efforts to subordinate the factory committees to authoritarian management. As we have seen, Lenin and his more obedient associates were eager to reduce trade unions to mere instruments for disciplining labor and brutally suppressed the widespread strikes that erupted to resist this development. Older worker-Bolsheviks were particularly embittered by the bureaucratization of the economy and the state; they vigorously opposed one-man management in industry and the subordination of trade unions, the last legal bastion of proletarian authority, to the growing party apparatus. In 1919–20, in defiance of Communist rule, they formed a new opposition—within the Communist trade unions and the Communist Party—to restore the libertarian utopianism of 1917 and some degree of soviet and workplace democracy. Their ideas were basically syndicalistic: they demanded the full participation of relatively independent trade unions in the administration of economic life. Instead of the state and the party, argued the faction, the trade unions should govern the country's economy while the party limited its activities to political affairs.

In 1920–21 their efforts crystallized into a loosely organized Workers' Opposition (the name Lenin sardonically imposed upon it). It was almost entirely proletarian in composition and gained considerable support from

many established trade unions—particularly the militant Metallurgical Union, which was led by Alexander Shliapnikov, the old worker-Bolshevik and first commissar of labor in the Sovnarkom. It also had the support of many party cells in the Donets basin and the industrial regions of the Ukraine. In 1921 the Opposition controlled the entire party organization in Samara province and managed, despite unrelenting Cheka harassment, to acquire about a quarter of the party's delegates in Moscow province.

The conflict between the Workers' Opposition and the Communist Party leadership opened at the Ninth Party Congress in 1920. There Shliapnikov, speaking for the Opposition, demanded that the trade unions oversee the production and distribution of goods in a democratic and collectivistic economic system. He boldly called for a threefold separation of power in Russia that would radically divest the party of its suffocating authority: control over economic life in Russia would thus be vested entirely in the trade unions, through a new All-Russian Congress of Producers; political life would be guided by the Communist Party, while the administration of governmental affairs would be handled by the soviets. The trade unions would thus be given ascendancy over the party in economic life, radically reversing the existing economic and political structure. As R.V. Daniels observes, Shliapnikov's proposal would have 'created a party within the party, a semiautonomous body embracing a substantial proportion of the party's membership, if not a majority.'²⁰

The trade unions' management of industry, in turn, was to be entirely democratic, based on elections, as Cathy Porter describes it:

At factory level, control would be with the factory committees; control over high-level economic decisions would lie with the unions, which would ratify every economic appointment—not a single person was to be appointed to any administrative/economic post without their agreement. Separate unions would elect managers for the various branches of the economy at regular national congresses; local trade-union conferences would elect local managers. The culmination of this bold program, which envisaged transforming industrial organization from below, was the demand for an All-Russian Producers' Congress, to be convened so that the central management of the entire economy could be elected.²¹

This proposal would have been a powerful antidote to the sweeping bureaucratization of economic, state and political power, embodying a proletarian version of village *volya* and the lost ideals of 1917. The Workers' Opposition made its proposal within the framework of the Communist Party, but it plainly spoke for far more worker-Communists than dared openly to adhere to it.

Despite Shliapnikov's long party experience, the Workers' Opposition lacked a compelling ideological spokesperson until Alexandra Kollontai joined the faction in January 1921. Kollontai, who had been a member of the first Sovnarkom, was a brilliant speaker and theorist who lent her talents to the faction, especially in a pamphlet called 'The Workers' Opposition'. Written in February 1921, just before the Tenth Party Congress convened, the pamphlet not only expanded on Shliapnikov's ideas; Kollontai castigated the privileged specialists who now exercised dictatorial authority under the system of one-man management. Industry must be managed collectively, she insisted, which was essential to the formation of a Communist society. The trade unions must play the all-important role of administering the economy. Far from subordinating or eliminating factory committees, they must foster and co-ordinate them: 'it is necessary to . . . *prepare factory and shop committees for running the industries.*' She rejected 'workers' management' of production, which might be conducted through the agency of the state or by trained specialists, and distinguished it from 'workers' control', in which the workers directly exercised power to make technical and administrative decisions and explored 'new forms of production'.²² Kollontai's pamphlet also launched a broad attack on the ills afflicting the Communist regime. Workers might well feel 'ardent affection and love' for Lenin and admire the 'incomparable and flowery eloquence of Trotsky and his organising abilities,' she affirmed, with perhaps some irony, but these sentiments should be reserved for the two men as political leaders, not as wise men capable of organizing the workplace. 'Instead of finding the means to encourage the mass initiative which could fit perfectly into our flexible Soviet institutions,' she scoffed, 'our Party leaders suddenly appear in the role of defenders and knights of bureaucracy.'²³ Turning to internal democracy, Kollontai declared that the party had chosen to suppress dissent instead of fostering it, warning that it must return to 'democracy, freedom of opinion, and criticism within the Party.' Notably, she did not criticize one-party rule; such a criticism would have verged on the criminal in 1921. Nor was she trying to create an alternative to the Communist Party; rather, she was diagnosing the ills of the existing party and prescribing a 'cure' within its accepted framework.

For the Tenth Party Congress, the Workers' Opposition leaders prepared a resolution containing three principal recommendations for restoring the party's social and political health. First, all party members should be required to do manual work at a workbench for three months out of each year, ostensibly to keep them in touch with workers' needs. Secondly, the party apparatus should be purged of careerists and opportunists. And finally, party members should have full freedom to discuss, even critically, all issues facing both the party and the country.

If the Workers' Opposition took quite literally Marx's formulation that only workers can make a proletarian revolution, Leninism had vested the achievement of socialism in the hands of professional revolutionaries and specialists. It is not surprising, then, that Lenin and his supporters viewed the proposals of the Workers' Opposition as outright anathema, constituting an intolerable infringement of the Central Committee's economic and social supremacy, and it heaped upon the Opposition a degree of abuse that was intense even for polemical tradition that had long been nourished on bitter vituperation.

THE TENTH PARTY CONGRESS

The Tenth Party Congress was a turning point in the history of Bolshevism, in both form and content. After months of factional debates in the party press, the Congress convened in Moscow on 8 March 1921. It was anything but a representative body. Victor Serge, who was on close terms with some of the party principals, wrote that in the months preceding the conference, the delegates had been chosen by scandalously undemocratic procedures:

The Party steamroller was at work. I took part in the discussion in one of the districts of Petrograd, and was horrified to see the voting rigged for Lenin's and Zinoviev's 'majority'. That way would resolve nothing: every day in Smolny the only talk was of factory incidents, strikes, and booing at Party agitators. This was in November and December of 1920.²⁴

At the Congress, Lenin (who had never worked in a factory) anointed himself the spokesman for the 'conscious' Russian working class and demagogically denounced the Workers' Opposition as a 'syndicalist and anarchist deviation' that threatened the 'party's unity'. Somehow it was also the product (incredibly) of 'an influx into the Party of former Mensheviks, and also of workers and peasants who have not fully assimilated the communist world outlook.'²⁵ Against this 'deviation,' he declared, the party must wage an 'unswerving and systematic struggle.'²⁶ He cast aspersions on Kollontai, the dedicated comrade who almost alone had supported his April Theses in 1917, — denouncing her as 'the Party's worst enemy,' as Angelica Balabanoff recalls, and

a menace to its unity. He went so far in his attack as to make allusions to certain episodes in Kollontai's intimate life [her earlier romantic involvement with Shliapnikov] that had nothing whatever to do with the issue. It

was the kind of polemic which did no credit to Lenin, and it was on this occasion that I realized the lengths to which Lenin would go in pursuit of his strategic aims, his opposition to a party opponent.²⁷

Not surprisingly, the carefully selected delegates to the Congress voted down the resolution of the Workers' Opposition and gave their support to Lenin's policy of endowing party bureaucrats with control over the trade unions.

At the very end of the Congress, after many of the delegates had already departed, Lenin introduced a resolution that condemned the Workers' Opposition as an 'anarcho-syndicalist deviation', which the overwhelming majority of the remaining delegates adopted. He then introduced a resolution on 'party unity', that castigated the existence of all intra-party groups that had 'separate platforms'—in short, factions. It called for their dissolution on pain of immediate expulsion from the party. As the resolution stated:

All class-conscious workers must clearly realise that factionalism of any kind is harmful and impermissible, for no matter how members of individual groups may desire to safeguard Party unity, factionalism in practice inevitably leads to the weakening of team-work and to intensified and repeated attempts by the enemies of the governing Party, who have wormed their way into it, to widen the cleavage and use it for *counter-revolutionary* purposes.²⁸

This was a historic and fateful resolution. Passed only by the rump of the Congress, it banned factional opposition as such. Unknown even to those who voted for it, the resolution also contained a secret provision that gave the Central Committee the authority to expel any party member by a two-thirds vote with the consent of the local unit to which the member belonged. This article was kept secret from the party membership for two years and was never abrogated. In later years Trotsky alleged that Lenin had been reluctant to ban factions and had done so only as a temporary emergency measure. Lenin himself later said the resolution had been 'an extreme measure . . . adopted specially, in view of the dangerous situation'²⁹—that is, the existence of the Workers' Opposition. But there is nothing in Lenin's writings or his behavior to show that he ever intended to abrogate the resolution. And the consequences of the entire provision lasted long after the Workers' Opposition was effectively banned.

The Congress not only banned factions—it did so enthusiastically. By hysterically denouncing 'repeated attempts by enemies of the party' who supposedly used 'factionalism' for 'counter-revolutionary purposes', the resolution anticipated the language and brutish mentality of Stalin.³⁰ Karl Radek, the Bolshevik journalist who played a major role in the German as well

as the Russian Communist movements, left no doubt that, by voting for the anti-faction resolution, he was surrendering his intellectual and political freedom of expression to the orders of the Central Committee. 'In voting for this resolution,' Radek declared,

I feel it can well be turned against us, and nevertheless I support it. . . . Let the Central Committee in a moment of danger take the severest measures against the best party comrades, if it finds this necessary. . . . Let the Central Committee even be mistaken! That is less dangerous than the wavering which is now observable.³¹

Afterward, in practice, the resolution banned not only the Workers' Opposition but all organized criticism of the party. Internal democracy came to an end. Stalin did not have to invent top-down reassignments of party officials and purges to mute oppositionists and critics; Lenin's anti-faction resolution had laid the groundwork. Workers' Opposition members were banished to places far from Moscow. Alexandra Kollontai was dispatched on diplomatic missions to Norway, Mexico and Sweden; Shliapnikov was ultimately expelled from the party and, in the 1930s, was executed by Stalin's police. Moreover, the resolution eliminated most of the dwindling freedoms for non-Bolshevik parties in Russia. The remaining Mensheviks, who had been trying to live within the parameters established by the Bolsheviks for 'loyal socialists', were banned, as was every organization that had previously enjoyed a legal if harried existence. With this resolution the Bolsheviks established not only a one-party state but one that endowed the party's Central Committee with enormous powers. The single most important person in creating the October Revolution—Lenin—had now become that Revolution's executioner, usurping it with a totalitarian state.

Leninist immorality, in fact, not only destroyed the October Revolution in Russia, it poisoned the socialist movement internationally and, together with the different but chronic pathologies of Social Democracy, deprived the revolutionary tradition of its moral high ground. Communist literature regressed from a vital body of theory into mechanical formulas. Argument was replaced by *ad hominem* attacks and ideological vulgarity. 'Criticisms', if such they could be called, made reckless use of highly charged epithets such as 'petty bourgeois', 'kulak', and even 'counter-revolutionary' in lieu of reasoned analysis, and critics were accused, not of dissent, but of social crimes. In Soviet Russia, honestly expressed views were not rebutted but criminalized; accusations of 'deviations' from the party 'line' turned dissent into a felony, to be resolved by the political police. While Lenin soon fell ill and then into silence, the party steadily descended into totalitarian repression.

The program of the Workers' Opposition was limited by its acceptance of the single-party Communist regime and was woefully lacking in a program for the peasantry. But it had been the last best chance within the Communist Party to restore its relatively libertarian program of 1917—assuming that trade unions controlling economic life could avoid bureaucratization, foster industrial democracy, and function in tandem with factory committees. Had it been able to break with the Bolsheviks and work with the Left SRs (and perhaps made common cause with the so-called Greens), a broader movement might well have emerged. How far it could have reversed the party's rapid movement toward a bureaucratic dictatorship and ultimately Stalin's autocracy, however, will never be known. But the dissolution of this libertarian tendency drove the final nail into the coffin of party democracy and opened the door to personal rule. Authority would be vested in the Central Committee, then in the smaller Politburo, and finally in the person of the party's general-secretary, Josef Stalin.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (New York and London: Viking, 1996), p. 610.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 640–41.
3. 'Subordination of Factory-Shop Committees to the Trade Unions', resolution of the First All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions (Jan. 27 [Jan. 14], 1918), in James Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1918: Documents and Materials* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1934), p. 642.
4. 'End of Trade-Union Independence', resolution of the Fourth Conference of Trade-Union Leaders (Mar. 12–17, 1918), in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 644.
5. Quoted in Leonard Schapiro, *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy: Political Opposition in the Soviet State, First Phase, 1917–1922*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 233.
6. Lenin, 'Immediate Tasks', pp. 267–8.
7. Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918–1922* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 86.
8. Quoted in Vladimir N. Brovkin, *The Mensheviks After October: Socialist Opposition and the Rise of the Bolshevik Dictatorship* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 245.
9. Quoted in full in Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines*, pp. 67–8.
10. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines*, p. 72.
11. Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky: 1879–1921* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 491–2.
12. Quoted in I. Steinberg, *Spiridonova: Revolutionary Terrorist*, trans. and ed. Gwenda David and Eric Mosbacher (London: Methuen & Co., 1935), p. 179.
13. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 214.

14. Quoted in *ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
16. Figes, *People's Tragedy*, p. 634.
17. Quoted in Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 184.
18. See Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, trans. and ed. Peter Sedgwick (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 75.
19. Serge, *Memoirs*, p. 75.
20. Robert Vincent Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 126.
21. Cathy Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai: A Biography* (New York: Dial Press, 1980), p. 369.
22. Alexandra Kollontai, *The Workers Opposition* (London: Solidarity Pamphlet, n.d.), pp. 11, 13.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 19; emphasis added.
24. Serge, *Memoirs*, p. 123.
25. V.I. Lenin, 'Preliminary Draft Resolution of the Tenth Congress of the R.C.P. on the Syndicalist and Anarchist Deviation in Our Party', in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963), p. 32:245.
26. V.I. Lenin, 'Report on Party Unity and the Anarcho-Syndicalist Deviation, March 16, 1921', in *Collected Works*, p. 32:255.
27. Angelica Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1938), p. 252.
28. V.I. Lenin, 'Preliminary Draft Resolution of the Tenth Congress of the R.C.P. on Party Unity', in *Collected Works*, p. 32:241; emphasis added.
29. V.I. Lenin, 'Summing-Up Speech on Party Unity and the Anarcho-Syndicalist Deviation, March 16', in *Collected Works*, p. 32:258.
30. Lenin, 'Preliminary Draft Resolution', p. 32:241.
31. Radek quoted in Leonard Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1959), p. 212.

CHAPTER 52 The Third Revolution

THE MAKHNOVSHCHINA

That Russia underwent a first revolution in February 1917 and a second revolution in October is self-evident. Did Russia have the potential for a third revolution? The Left SRs and the Workers' Opposition were not revolutionary, because both worked within the parameters of the existing authoritarian regime. Although the Left SRs challenged one-party Communist rule, they did not challenge the existing government; the Workers' Opposition, for its part, did not challenge one-party Communist rule. But several other movements did arise during the civil war that support the notion that the Russian Revolution, like those that preceded it, possessed the potential for a major third revolution. 7 Notes

The most sustained and dramatic of these movements were the Ukrainian guerrillas led by Nestor Makhno, who called himself an anarchist and variously united with or fought against the Bolsheviks for some three years. The *makhnovshchina* (as this movement was called) developed within the social chaos of wartime Ukraine, in which semi-feudal and bourgeois nationalists competed with socialists, peasants and warlords to carve out fiefdoms and an independent Ukrainian state. As Bruce Lincoln observes,

No region of the Russian Empire witnessed more violence, more destruction, and more unvarnished cruelty of man and man during Russia's Civil War than the Ukraine . . . Its lands repeatedly torn by German occupation, Bolshevik expansionism, Ukrainian nationalism, peasant anarchism, and Polish invasion, the Ukraine became a battleground over which armies fought without respite between the fall of 1917 and the summer of 1920.¹

On 4 March, in the wake of the February Revolution, a nationalist government based on the Rada (or Ukrainian supreme council) was established in Kiev to rule the Ukraine and thereafter to move gradually toward achieving greater autonomy for the region. At the end of November 1917 the Rada declared the

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Self
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Ukraine an independent state. The privileged strata of the population, especially the landlords who had forfeited their lands following the Soviet Land Decree, turned to Germany for protection against Soviet Russia and in February 1918 abetted the invasion of German troops in their eastward march. Under the terms of the Brest-Litovsk treaty (signed on 3 March), Germany annexed the Ukraine. But several months later, when the Rada proved dilatory in collecting grain for export to Berlin, the Germans abandoned the Rada and established in its stead a puppet government headed by Hetman Skoropadsky.

Makhno Nestor Makhno, a semi-literate Ukrainian peasant and onetime foundry worker, began his political life in an anarcho-communist group in 1906, at the age of seventeen. Several years later he was arrested for engaging in a terrorist plot that led to the death of a district police officer and was sentenced to be hanged. Because of his youth, however, his death sentence was commuted to imprisonment, starting in 1910, in the Butyrk prison in Moscow. There he befriended Pyotr Arshinov, an anarchist who had been jailed for smuggling anarchist literature into Russia. Arshinov systematically taught Makhno the basic doctrines of Bakunin and Kropotkin, transforming the unschooled peasant into a committed anarchist.

Both Arshinov and Makhno were freed by the February Revolution's amnesty of March 1917, after which Makhno quickly made his way back to the town of his birth, Guliai-Pole, in southeastern Ukraine.* There he formed a Peasant Union to defend the lands that the peasants had seized; by August, when the Peasant Union became the local soviet, he became the chairman of its executive committee. He also organized a small band of guerrillas whose avowed aim was 'to expropriate ... the people's wealth: the land, factories, plants, printing shops.'²

In the spring of 1918 Skoropadsky's forces and the advancing German and Austrian troops reached Makhno's home province, Ekaterinoslav. Faced with the likelihood of capture by the invaders, Makhno, on the advice of local anarchists, made his way into Soviet Russia, partly to escape capture and partly to make contact with anarchists in Russian cities and gain their support for his efforts in the Ukraine. Making his way through the river towns, he surfaced in Moscow in June, where he met with the city's anarchists. Their relative inactivity and lack of fighting spirit disappointed him, and when he visited Kro-

* Contrary to some accounts, Guliai-Pole was not a village but a sizable commercial, administrative and industrial center of about 30,000 residents. It supported two churches, three schools, a hospital, a post office, and a synagogue. It contained two factories that manufactured agricultural machinery, numerous craft shops, a grain market, many stores, distilleries, steam mills, and dozens of windmills. The town was known in the area for its large fairs.

potkin, the sedate anarchist elder was 'not very taken with Makhno.'³ By contrast, when Makhno was obliged to deal with Lenin in order to obtain documents for his return to the Ukraine, the Bolshevik leader was apparently quite taken with the outspoken and feisty young anarchist and gave him the assistance he requested. Upon his return Makhno organized another guerrilla force to engage the Austrian occupiers of his town and their reactionary Ukrainian allies, who still held large areas of the region.

Makhno had never received any formal military training and knew nothing of military strategy, but he proved to be a brilliant tactician, fighting Cossack style, with a hit-and-run mobility that gave him an incomparable advantage over his conventionally schooled opponents. His military prowess lay partly in his extraordinary tactical audacity: on several occasions he and his men dressed in their enemies' uniforms, boldly infiltrated their lines, learned of their plans, and then attacked them where and when they least expected it. But perhaps the most distinguishing feature of Makhno's guerrilla force—called the Revolutionary Insurgent Army—was its remarkable mobility. His troops could dash as much as 50 miles in a single day over the open steppelands between the Sea of Azov and the Dnieper River. Armed with sabers as well as rifles, the cavalry and infantry rode with machine guns on speedy light carts drawn by two horses each, allowing them to appear or vanish in a matter of hours. They could weave around, dodge, outpace and conquer opposing forces that were greatly superior to them in both numbers and armaments. Speed gave them the element of surprise: the *makhnovtsy* could suddenly surface as if from nowhere and outflank the astonished enemy. If seriously challenged, they could quickly demobilize, bury their weapons, and disappear into the general peasant population, after which, when summoned, they could remobilize as an organized military force. These tactics were deeply rooted in their native Cossack tradition of a free-wheeling and democratic fighting force. *mobility*

Joined by eager volunteers, Makhno's army peaked at 20,000 men, fighting openly as populist agrarian revolutionaries under an anarchist black flag that bore the slogan 'Liberty or Death' and later 'Land for the Peasants and Factories for the Workers'.⁴ Charismatic and daring, Makhno earned the deep respect of his followers, who bestowed upon him the respectful title *batko*, or 'little father'.

Following the German capitulation to the Allies in November 1918, German troops retreated rapidly from the Ukraine, and the by-now universally loathed Skoropadsky was deposed in short order. In December the vacuum he left was filled by Simon Petliura's Ukrainian nationalist government (the so-called Directory). It lasted only a few months, until February 1919, when the Reds drove Petliura out of the Ukraine. But the Bolsheviks' own hold on the Ukraine was weak, and the country quickly fell into chaos. During the next few years, Makhno's army fought the whole range of nationalist and counter-

↑ revolutionary military forces in the area, but aside from the loose detachments of the hetman, Petliura, and various warlords and Rada Cossacks, Makhno's most serious enemies were General Denikin's well-organized Volunteer Army and the Bolsheviks' sizable Red Army.

— Fighting almost continuously during these years, Makhno seldom had the opportunity to put his constructive ideas into practice. But between December 1918 and June 1919, a relative peace existed in an area around Guliai-Pole; there was also a hiatus in organized governmental rule. It was at this time that the Makhno movement tried to put its libertarian ideas into practice. It established at least four free agricultural communes, numbering 100 to 300 participants each, in which 'everyone . . . had to work, each to the extent of his ability.'⁵ Food and other goods were distributed in accordance with need, in a traditional Communist fashion. The movement also called for the creation of soviets—not the party-controlled Bolshevik version that already existed, but 'free soviets' from which political parties were reduced to observer status in a socially egalitarian system. The Makhnovists demanded:

The overthrow of the monarchist, coalition, republican and Social-Democratic Communist-Bolshevik party governments, which must give place to a free and independent soviet order of toilers, without rulers and their arbitrary laws. For the true soviet order is not the rule of the Social-Democratic Communist-Bolsheviks which now calls itself the soviet power, but a higher form of anti-authoritarian and anti-statist socialism, manifesting itself in the organization of a free, happy, and independent structure for the social life of the toilers.⁶

Michael Palij observes that Makhno's 'partisans and the peasants understood the slogan "free anarcho-communes" to mean free individual farms, and decentralized democratic self-government. This was a spontaneous manifestation of the Ukrainian peasants' anarchism.'⁷ Makhno's anarchism, in short, was the old peasant *volya*, recast—with modifications—in anarchist terminology.*

* Notoriously, Makhno disliked cities. When urban workers came to him for advice on how to organize, he was unable to offer them coherent suggestions. In October and November 1918 his forces occupied two large Ukrainian cities, Ekaterinoslav and Aleksandrovsk, where he tried to apply his anarchist principles to urban situations. But 'Makhno's utopian projects . . . failed to win over more than a small minority of work-
— ingmen,' notes Paul Avrich, 'for, unlike the farmers and artisans of the village, who were independent producers accustomed to managing their own affairs, factory workers and miners operated as interdependent parts of a complicated industrial machine, and were lost without the guidance of supervisors and technical specialists. . . . [Moreover, Makhno] never understood the complexities of an urban economy, nor did he care to understand them. He detested the "poison" of the cities and cherished the natural simplicity of the peasant environment into which he had been born.' Quoted in Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 219.

A number of urban anarchists, most notably Voline, Arshinov and Aron Baron, found their way to the Ukraine, where they functioned on Makhno's propaganda and educational committees; but other urban anarchists inflexibly denigrated the *makhnovshchina* as an elemental peasant movement with the traits of a military command—no less! Precisely how they expected Makhno's force to fight successfully in strictly a libertarian manner is difficult to determine. Makhno's movement, in fact, approximated libertarian socialist practices as closely as any effective militia army could have done under the circumstances. During lulls in the fighting the partisans were permitted to elect junior commanders and discuss battle tactics, but no force of 20,000 men can hope to function along strictly libertarian lines. And no scattered, 'spontaneous', and poorly equipped bands of peasants could have hoped to prevail against the trained, organized, and well-armed White and Red armies. 'War anarchism', if such it can be called, required troops to accept a stern measure of military discipline. Nor is it likely that ordinary troopers would have wanted it any other way, for the *makhnovtsy* trusted the *batko* implicitly and answered only to him. With the aid of his most trusted officers (whom he appointed), Makhno had to make both tactical and strategic decisions if he hoped to prevail against his opponents.

Meanwhile, in March 1918, soon after the Bolsheviks had driven out Petliura's Directory, Denikin's White Army advanced into southeastern Ukraine and ousted the Reds. The White offensive continued during the summer of 1919, capturing Kiev in August, whereupon soviet power in the entire Ukraine crumbled. Fortunately for the Bolsheviks, Makhno's Revolutionary Insurgent Army continually harassed the Whites, but the Insurgent Army's relations with the Red Army were marked by precarious on-off alliances. The Communists were fundamentally hostile to Makhno: in May 1919 the Cheka, before it realized that the Reds could use him, tried to assassinate the *batko*. In June Trotsky, who openly forbade the *makhnovtsy* to call their fourth regional congress, demagogically denounced them as 'counter-revolutionary' and 'kulaks' and outlawed their leader.

When circumstances demanded it, however, the *makhnovtsy* and the Communists were able to join forces against the Whites. In the late summer of 1919, when Denikin began his all-or-nothing northward drive toward Moscow, Makhno's army was accepted into the Red Army as a semi-autonomous force and in the Ukraine played a decisive role in crippling Denikin's offensive. Attacking the Whites near Uman in September 1919, they cut Denikin's supply lines to the Black Sea ports, from which he received most of his weapons and supplies, and seized other key points as well, especially White supply bases. In October, just as Denikin was launching his final attack on Orel in the hope of taking Moscow, Makhno's partisans destroyed a White supply depot that

contained 60,000 artillery shells. Denikin's drive toward Moscow was aborted, and his troops fled pell-mell toward the Black Sea. According to a *Le Temps* correspondent in Moscow, 'There is no doubt that Denikin's defeat is explained more by the uprisings of the peasants who brandished Makhno's black flag than by the success of Trotsky's regular army.'⁸

The Communists, needless to say, displayed little gratitude to Makhno for his assistance. Shortly after the destruction of Denikin's offensive, Trotsky ordered Makhno to debark for the Polish front, a command that the anarchist leader recognized as an effort to remove him from his most supportive region, the Ukraine. He refused to leave, whereupon the Communists outlawed his army, and for eight months the *makhnovtsy* were compelled to fight them again. In October 1920, however, during Wrangel's march from the Crimea into the Ukraine, the Communists and Makhno reached another brief truce, based on a Communist promise to amnesty anarchist prisoners and guarantee all Russian anarchists freedom to propagate their views. The Reds and *makhnovtsy* then resumed their joint operations against the Whites, during which the Insurgent Army again played a vital role.

Not surprisingly, as soon as Wrangel's forces were defeated, Trotsky and his aides reneged on their promise, and on 25 November they seized Makhno's commanders—who had just helped them defeat Wrangel—and summarily executed them. The Cheka raided Makhno's headquarters and murdered most of his staff. Makhno himself, together with a small force, managed to elude capture. Although his militia force still numbered in the thousands and employed extraordinary fighting methods, it could not withstand the organized assault that the Communists now mounted against it. Finally in 1921, wounded and ill, Makhno led 80 of his followers across the Romanian frontier, and after several years of imprisonment in Romania and Poland, he made his way to permanent exile in Paris in 1925.

In exile, Makhno and Arshinov evaluated the realities that the *makhnovtsy* had had to face in the Ukraine and concluded that if the anarchist movement were to succeed against its well-organized opponents, it needed a co-ordinating center and a coherent program. Almost the entire anarchist establishment—from Errico Malatesta to Alexander Berkman—turned against him, impugning him with arguments drawn from the basically individualistic core of their ideology. Maligned and subjected to insults of every kind, a bitter Arshinov finally returned to Russia, where he fell victim to the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. Makhno—the only anarchist to play a significant role in the Russian Revolution, and a heroic one at that—died in 1935, lonely, ill, penurious, and abandoned by most anarchist purists. After his death, he was elevated to high status in the anarchist pantheon—although his assertion of the need for a well-organized libertarian movement was virtually ignored.

THE KRONSTADT REVOLT

About 25 miles due west of Petrograd, in the Gulf of Finland, lies Kotland Island, on whose eastern end Peter the Great built a naval base known as Kronstadt. In 1917 the sailors based at Kronstadt were zealous supporters of the Bolsheviks; Trotsky repeatedly described them as the 'pride and glory of the Revolution', and years of shared struggle during the civil war seemed to weld the Kronstadters indissolubly to the Bolsheviks. At the end of February 1921, however, Russia was stunned by an event that constituted a historic tragedy. On the night of 28 February, recalls Victor Serge, a former anarchist who had become a Communist Party member, 'I was awoken by the ringing of a telephone. . . . An agitated voice told me: "Kronstadt is in the hands of the Whites. We are all under orders."' ⁹ The description of the uprising as 'White' was a scandalous fabrication: the sailors at the Kronstadt base had risen against Communist rule for reasons that had no connection with any counter-revolutionary forces in the civil war.

Since the February Revolution, Kronstadt had been substantially more than a naval base: its sailors regarded it as a 'commune', notably a unified revolutionary municipality composed of thousands of workers as well as military personnel. In May 1917 the Kronstadt Soviet had defied the Provisional Government and proclaimed itself 'the sole power in the city' ¹⁰; thereafter it exercised overall political authority in the island through its general assemblies, which were held almost every day in Anchor Square, Kotlin Island's public meeting area. (One local Bolshevik approvingly called these assemblies 'Kronstadt's *veche*', referring to the medieval popular assemblies of Novgorod and Pskov. ¹¹) The citizens of Kronstadt were consciously creating a new social order based on a mixture of *narodnik* and socialist ideas, drawing on the directly democratic institutions and practices of the Russian village assemblies. The sailors rallied militantly against Kornilov and in October helped seize the Winter Palace. Kronstadters were in the forefront of the defense of Petrograd against Kerensky's troops at the beginning of the civil war and against Yudenich's at its end. Throughout the conflict the Bolsheviks used the sailors repeatedly to cope with serious trouble spots. Regarded as the praetorian guard of Bolshevism, the sailors were relatively privileged: their food rations were higher than those of skilled workers in Petrograd, and their living conditions were better than those of many party officials.

Kronstadt's faith in Bolshevism, however, had been slowly deteriorating since early 1918. Many Kronstadters had opposed the Brest-Litovsk treaty and protested against the Cheka's attack on the anarchists. (Contrary to myth, however, very few Kronstadters were themselves anarchists, regarding them as irresponsible and adventurist.) In July 1918 quite a few Kronstadters had

joined the short-lived Left SR uprising; and as former peasants, they loathed the food requisition squads. In the fall of 1920, after Wrangel was defeated, many sailors went back to their home villages on the mainland and learned from their families and neighbors about the suffering of their relatives, friends, and neighbors under 'war communism'. 'When we returned home,' one sailor later wrote, 'our parents asked why we fought for the oppressors [the Bolsheviks]. That set us thinking.'¹² The hunger and Red Terror that had swept through the countryside incensed them. The very qualities that had made the sailors 'the pride and glory of the Revolution'—their outrage at injustice—now worked against the regime. Between August 1920 and March 1921, half of the Kronstadt Communist Party's 4000 members either left the party or were purged.

Meanwhile on the mainland the unusually severe winter of 1921 had brought the Petrograd and Moscow proletarians' endurance to a breaking point: they now had had all they could take of 'war communism', with its near-starvation rations, its shortages of coal and oil, its scarcity of warm clothing, shoes and fuel, and above all its abusive commissars, who seemed to live in relative comfort. Almost every aspect of daily life had become intolerable. Food prices were soaring: between January and February 1921 the price of potatoes and rye bread increased almost threefold—and on 22 January the government cut the already inadequate bread ration by a third. Cold and hungry workers left their workplaces to walk, poorly shod if not barefoot, into the countryside to forage for wood and food for their families. When they tried to bring even their desperately paltry supplies back to the city, they were stopped by government roadblocks, searched, and their goods confiscated.

The workers were left with no choice but to take mass action: February saw a new wave of factory rallies, demonstrations and strikes. Despite their physical exhaustion, thousands of workers in Petrograd, Moscow, and other cities took to the streets with placards that called for 'free trade' between town and country, higher rations, and an end to grain requisitioning. In Petrograd the remaining Mensheviks spurred on these demonstrations with leaflets calling for an end to Bolshevik decrees, the liberation of all imprisoned socialists, freedom of speech and the press, and free elections to factory committees and soviets. Despite heavy Cheka repression, the remaining SRs also participated in this agitation, calling above all for the restoration of the Constituent Assembly. On 25 February a general strike swept through Petrograd, starting at the Trubochoy metalworks and spreading through many plants and shops in the city, even encompassing the much-reduced number of Putilov workers.

The government responded with lockouts and Cheka terror. The Cheka raided the Menshevik headquarters, eventually netting 3000 real or suspected members of the party throughout Russia as well as its entire Central Com-

mittee. Select troops were posted on almost every street corner in Petrograd. The old center of the Revolution looked like an occupied city. On 27 February Zinoviev, the Petrograd party boss, tried to soften the terror by conceding to several of the strikers' demands. An extra food ration would be provided, he announced; the detested roadblocks between town and country would be removed; and plans were under way to put an end to 'war communism'. Between these concessions and Cheka intimidation, the Bolshevik leadership ended the strike after a week.

Kronstadt, 25 miles away, knew little of the workers' February demonstrations. The government feared that if news of the protests reached Kronstadt, the sailors would rise in solidarity with their long-standing allies, the Petrograd proletariat, and present a formidable threat to the regime. The government thus ordered all news of the strike to be censored—so tightly were the press and radio controlled by the Communist regime, in fact, that it largely succeeded in preventing it from reaching the sailors. Even so, rumors of demonstrations in Petrograd filtered from the city to the island. On 26 February sailors held emergency general crew meetings on the base's largest battleships. Finally the crews of the dreadnoughts *Petropavlovsk* and *Sevastopol* decided to send a 26-man delegation to Petrograd to observe the situation there and report back to their comrades.

Led by Stepan Petrichenko, an old rebel and former Communist Party member, the observers found the city's factories surrounded by troops and the workers patently fearful of speaking openly. One of the more courageous workers told the Kronstadters:

We have no shoes and no clothes. We are physically and morally terrorized. Each and every one of our requests and demands is met by the authorities with terror, terror, endless terror. Look at the prisons of Petrograd and you will see how many of our comrades sit there after being arrested in the last three days.¹³

Returning to the island on 28 February, the indignant sailors reported their findings to the two ships' crews. The outraged sailors thereupon drew up a resolution that contained fifteen basic demands: new elections by secret ballot to free soviets; complete freedom of speech and press for all workers, peasants, Left socialist parties, and anarchists; freedom of assembly for trade unions and peasant organizations; liberation of all socialist political prisoners and all worker, peasant, soldier, and sailor political prisoners; a review of the cases of all prisoners in concentration camps; abolition of privileges for specific parties; removal of the roadblocks that impeded individual trade between city dwellers and peasants; abolition of 'special' or select Communist fighting units; equal

rations for all citizens; the right of peasants to full access to their land (but not the right to hire labor); the end of food requisitions; and the right of craftsmen freely to sell their goods. The resolution was signed by Petrichenko (as chairman of the squadron meeting) and G.P. Perepelkin (as secretary). The Kronstadters still believed in the utopian ideals of the October Revolution for which the Bolsheviks had ostensibly once stood, especially the slogan 'All power to the soviets!': a government of free soviets, representing the 'toilers' of Russia, to replace the increasingly one-party Communist regime.

The next day, 1 March, in Anchor Square, a general meeting of 15,000 people heard the delegation of observers repeat their report on Petrograd to the general public. Petrichenko read the *Petropavlovsk* resolution, which was greeted by enthusiastic cheers. The Communist representative in attendance tried to defend the government, but his arrogance infuriated the crowd, who drove him from the podium. The assembly then voted to endorse the resolution and to send a second delegation of sailors to Petrograd, to inform the workers about the resolution. As soon as this 30-person delegation reached Petrograd, the Cheka arrested them, and nothing more was ever heard of them.

The following day 300 local delegates assembled for a conference to organize new elections for the Kronstadt Soviet. Nikolai Kuzmin, the Communist commissar of the Baltic Fleet, grimly warned the delegates not to form a dual power against the government: 'if the delegates wanted an armed struggle,' he threatened, 'they would get it.'¹⁴ This warning was received with open hostility, and the Kronstadters proceeded to arrest Kuzmin. The Kronstadters had now openly defied the regime. While the conference was still in session, a message arrived that fifteen truckloads of heavily armed Red troops were at that moment crossing the ice in order to disband the meeting. This information was in fact erroneous, but the conference, not knowing this at the time, decided on the advice of Petrichenko to establish a five-man Provisional Revolutionary Committee to administer the city until a new Kronstadt Soviet could be elected. By forming this clearly military body, the naval base had passed the point of no return: it was now in a state of insurrection, and an armed conflict with the Communist state was inevitable. A new periodical, the *Kronstadt Izvestia*, proclaimed, 'All power to the soviets, not to political parties' and 'victory or death.'¹⁵

The mainland authorities' greatest fear, again, was that the uprising might spread—first to the Red Army conscripts garrisoned in the Petrograd area, then to the relatively subdued workers. The Communist press went to work, vigorously denouncing the Kronstadters as dangerous counter-revolutionaries—knowingly shrieking false charges of a White Guard plot to unseat the government and return Russia to a tsarist monarchy. The panicked Zinoviev formed a Petrograd Defense Committee whose express purpose was

to contain and suppress the uprising. On 5 March this committee warned that the insurgents would be 'shot like partridges' if they refused to surrender within 24 hours. On the same day Trotsky issued an ultimatum demanding that the mutinous sailors surrender immediately and unconditionally.

The waters of the Finnish gulf between Kronstadt and Petrograd freeze over for four months during winter, and the ice ordinarily does not melt until the end of March. During these months the ice is thick enough to sustain a substantial infantry force. On such ice, troops that set out on foot could cross the gulf and likely take the fortress. Although the fortress's main defense, the dreadnoughts—the largest and the most sophisticated warships in the Red Navy—would be able to fire on them, the ships would be immobilized by the ice and incapable of maneuvering around the gulf. During the first week of March 1921, however, the ice was beginning to melt in several areas, and if the melting continued sufficiently, the base, with its fortresses and artillery, would become virtually impregnable, and the two dreadnoughts would be able to maneuver around the gulf and bombard Red troop concentrations at will. They could also enter the Baltic Sea and obtain ammunition and supplies for the base from sympathetic depots along the coast. Those supplies were in fact much needed. The winter of 1920–21 was a very harsh one, and the sailors were suffering from insufficient food and clothing as well as a dearth of oil reserves. Kronstadt was not stocked sufficiently to withstand even a moderately extended siege; the sailors could only hope that the ice would break up early enough to spare them from a repressive and bloody Communist victory.

To retain its advantage, the Communist government acted at once. It brought in the singularly brilliant Red general, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, to plan and command the attack. On 7 March Tukhachevsky's preparations were complete, and his troops opened artillery fire on a chain of forts in the gulf that linked Kronstadt to the coast. The Kronstadters returned fire, both from the dreadnoughts and from the fortress itself. That night a severe blizzard buried the ice around the fortress in huge drifts. The fog was so dense that visibility was zero. Nonetheless in the early morning hours of 8 March the Reds began their advance, but the Kronstadters opened fire and easily repulsed them, leaving about 500 dead and 2000 wounded strewn on the ice.

On 8 March the sailors proclaimed a radically new goal in an article called 'What We Are Fighting For': Kronstadt, they announced, was moving beyond the February and October revolutions: 'Here at Kronstadt the first stone of the *third revolution* has been laid.'¹⁶ The sailors were confident that their uprising would trigger a nationwide uprising against the 'commissarocracy' and create a more libertarian society. Strategically they were counting on a rebellion by troops and workers on the mainland to sustain their cause. But the Petrograd workers were too exhausted to respond to their call: seven years of war, four

years of hunger, continuous shortages of the necessities of life, and above all Cheka terrorism had all taken their toll. Now socially inert, they were pre-occupied with the pursuit of the immediate means of life. As Emma Goldman, a witness to the events, was grimly to recall:

The Petrograd strikers ... were weakened by slow starvation and their energy sapped. ... They had no more fight nor faith left to come to the aid of their Kronstadt comrades who had so selflessly taken up their cause and who were about to give up their lives for them. Kronstadt was forsaken by Petrograd and cut off from the rest of Russia.¹⁷

The Bolsheviks used every device at their disposal to forestall a mainland revolt. On 8 March the Tenth Party Congress (the Congress that would reject the Workers' Opposition's program of trade union hegemony and ban factions) was just convening in Moscow. One action of that Congress would be to declare the end of 'war communism' and abolish forced grain requisitions; peasants would henceforth have to turn over to the government only one-quarter of their harvest, after which they were free to dispose of the rest—even to sell it on the open market. Freedom of trade for small-scale industry as well as agriculture was to be restored. These changes would shift Russia to a less restrictive economy, thereby reducing much discontent and, hopefully, allow the people finally to get enough to eat.

Meanwhile Tukhachevsky's forces were too demoralized by the failure of the first assault to repeat their headlong rush, over open ice, under Kronstadt's artillery fire. Tukhachevsky, gloomily watching the ice begin to break up, had to act quickly and urgently called for massive reserves and material. Fresh troops were brought in from distant Russian cities, and on 10 March he ordered another attack upon the base, which failed, followed two days later by still another charge on the ice, which also failed.

To all appearances the Kronstadt sailors and soldiers were victorious. But in fact their straitened circumstances forced them to live on a daily ration of a quarter-pound of rye bread and a potato biscuit, with fragments of horsemeat and a few handfuls of oats. They issued appeal after appeal for proletarian and troop support from the mainland, but to their increasing disgust their appeals received no response—not even from Petrograd.

By 15 March Tukhachevsky had marshaled a formidable force: airplanes, massive guns, the ablest officers, and 45,000 soldiers, including cadets and Chekists. A large proportion of the troops were Communist Party members, including many delegates from the Tenth Party Congress, who had been rushed from Moscow to Petrograd to battle the Kronstadters (leaving the firm Leninists at the congress free, on 16 March, to ban the Workers' Opposition

and all factions). The delegates also brought the masses of Petrograd the news that the congress had abolished food requisitions and would now permit free trade between city and countryside. The news of these reforms produced such feelings of jubilation that even the Communists themselves were startled. Observes Bruce Lincoln: 'Not even Lenin could have anticipated how quickly the abolition of one of the most despised programs of War Communism would rally the Russians behind the Bolsheviks and against Kronstadt.'¹⁸ After four years of debilitating civil war, workers and peasants rallied behind the government and turned their backs on the Kronstadt sailors.

It was in this new setting that, on the afternoon of 16 March, the Reds began their attack on Kronstadt. Artillery struck the *Petropavlovsk* and the *Sevastopol*, and aircraft bombarded the fortress. Tukhachevsky then launched a massive attack on the base, originating from three points on the coast. About 50,000 well-armed, relatively well-fed troops were pitted against 15,000 hungry insurgents. In the darkness of the morning of 17 March shock troops inched forward on all fours over the ice, which was thawing and pocked with treacherous holes that swallowed up many besiegers in the icy waters of the gulf. Just as the Red troops reached the perimeter of the base, searchlights and flares from the island suddenly illuminated the night, exposing the attackers to heavy machine-gun fire, grenades and artillery. At daylight, however, the next wave of attackers breached the perimeter of the base, and day-long street fighting raged throughout the island's streets. One by one the Reds captured the peripheral forts. Shortly before midnight the two dreadnoughts fell to the assault, and the Reds used the ships' radios to send out victory messages to their commanders on the mainland. They were premature: not until noon on 18 March—ironically, the 50th anniversary of the Paris Commune—did Kronstadt's resistance come to a final end.

On the evening of the 17 March, when it was clear that all was lost, some 800 Kronstadters, including eleven members of the base's Revolutionary Committee, escaped across the ice to safety in Finland, followed by 700 defenders of the base. Had they surrendered to the government, they undoubtedly would have been executed, as all the prisoners were. During the fighting the Reds took no prisoners; captives were shot summarily. Capturing Kronstadt probably cost the Red troops some 10,000 dead, wounded and missing. The number of Kronstadt sailors and their supporters who lost their lives is not known: at least 600 are believed to have been killed, 1000 were wounded, and 2500 were taken prisoner. The government later promised the sailors who had fled to Finland amnesty if they returned; those who believed this false promise and accepted the offer found themselves in Russian concentration camps.

For their part, the Kronstadters felt betrayed by the workers and peasants,

They had hoped their 'third revolution' would sweep across Russia and restore soviet democracy. When the Menshevik leader Fyodor Dan met Kronstadt sailors awaiting execution in jail, they expressed bitter resentment toward the Petrograd workers, who 'would not support them and sold them down the drain for a pound of meat.'¹⁹ Israel Getzler observes that 'some captured sailors, when transported in chains on trucks through the streets of Petrograd to the place of execution, are reported to have sworn at groups of workers whom they passed.'²⁰

The blood of the captured Kronstadt sailors, who were murdered with a vindictiveness that beggars description, proved to be the blood that had once given vitality to the revolution itself. For a century, as we have seen, a vital political culture of critical thought, rebellion and self-sacrificing dedication had struggled to undermine the tsarist autocracy, successfully bringing it down in February 1917. This century-old culture was now ruthlessly stamped out, not only in Kronstadt but throughout Russia, by a 'Leninism' based on political opportunism and repression, even of once-unimpeachable socialist militants.

In fact, the revolutionary socialists, no less than the Kronstadters, had overestimated the inherent revolutionary potential of the working class. The broad mass of Petrograd workers—the most class-conscious in Russia—were motivated by their desire for better living and working conditions, not for seeming abstractions like a socialist society, let alone world revolution. Such cries came primarily from the quasi-proletarian revolutionary intelligentsia. The astonishing shift in loyalties by the large majority of Russian proletarians during the Kronstadt uprising suggests that they could very well have been won over to capitalism if it offered a livable income and improved living standards. No sooner did the Bolsheviks abandon 'war communism' in 1921 and replace it with the New Economic Policy (or NEP, which allowed for free trade and income differentials, including the making of profit), than the workers ceased to demand workers' control of the economy and trade unions and to support the Workers' Opposition.

Following the Tenth Party Congress and the defeat of Kronstadt, the vital political culture of 1917 came to an end. Whatever political life remained in Russia existed at the summits of the Communist Party, with little or no echoes among the workers. When at length Trotsky initiated his struggle against Stalin's nationalistic chauvinism and the concept of 'socialism in one country', he gained virtually no support from the once-revolutionary workers and even intelligentsia who had at one time been so responsive to even the most extremist elements among the Russian masses. The Revolution had all but come to an end.

THE GREEN REVOLT

But not entirely so. Ironically, it was in the countryside, among the peasantry, that attempts to achieve the egalitarian ideal of *volya* persisted into 1922. During the civil war the food requisition squads, while onerous, had not been sufficient to provoke a peasant war against the soviet government. Following the defeat of Denikin and Wrangel in 1920, however, the peasants saw no reason for requisitions to continue. When they did indeed continue after the Whites were gone, peasant anger at the Communists flared up with a fury that brought Russia to the point of a major agrarian uprising.

The authentic center of the peasant war emerged in the province of Tambov, long an SR stronghold, which had suffered heavily during the civil war: Denikin's troops had laid waste to much of the land and aroused bitter peasant resistance. The principal organizer of the last great uprising was an SR member, Alexander Antonov, who had broken with the PSR to join the Left SRs. Following the repression of the Left SRs in 1918, he had gone into hiding in the woods, where he covertly gathered a band of 150 zealous peasant guerrillas. When food requisition squads arrived in the fall of 1918, Antonov fought them as best he could; nevertheless he lay low for two years as the civil war raged around his band. Finally, and quite suddenly, in the summer of 1920 he emerged to fight the Bolsheviks—this time with a well-organized force of 6000 committed villagers.

The local Tambov SRs (in defiance of the more conservative PSR leadership) were heavily preoccupied with preparing for the uprising and drew up a statement of purpose that, in turn, was adopted by a provincial peasants' congress in May 1920. Clearly influenced by populist thinking, the statement made classic SR demands, including the convening of a new constituent assembly, but with recallable representatives; socialization of land; and broad civil liberties and rights. In reality, however, the movement was motivated less by ideology than by a desire to avenge Bolshevik abuses. Participants in the various scattered *bunty* that made up the uprising had several common goals: to end grain requisitions; to restore free trade with the cities; to overthrow the Communist government; and to re-establish peasant self-rule and defend *volya* in the form of free local soviets.

Many of their goals, in effect, closely resembled those of the Left SRs rather than the SRs. In truth, the Left SRs were involved in many of the Green revolts, as the uprisings were called, especially in the various combat units and the unions that the villages formed. Oliver Radkey, in his account of the uprising of the Tambov Greens, notes that the Left SRs were 'a major factor'. Documentation is scarce, but what we have 'leaves not the slightest doubt that Antonov made and sustained the operation that bears his name, assisted at

every turn by [Peter] Tokmakov as the chief Left SR representative on the scene.²¹

Tambov revolt
The Tambov rising began in August 1920, when a requisition squad arrived in the village of Kamenka to appropriate grain. Although the harvest had been poor that year, the Reds had imposed a very steep grain levy on Kamenka. If the peasants had turned over as much grain as the squad demanded, they would have starved simply for lack of planting seed. Seeing no alternative, the Kamenka peasants killed seven members of the requisition squad and then armed themselves with guns and pitchforks. Joined by peasants from neighboring villages, they formed a small militia and prepared for more such actions against requisitioners. Kamenka and its neighboring villages proceeded to overthrow their official soviets—which were stacked with Communist Party members and provided them with no outlet for political expression—and replaced them with Peasant Unions (or STKs). Local SRs and Left SRs had played a great role in organizing these unions, which soon became peasant-elected local governmental bodies and formed a widespread network throughout rural Russia.

repression
The rebels thereupon decided to march on Tambov, but no sooner had they come within ten miles of the city than the Bolsheviks attacked them in force and drove them off. The Reds then inflicted a widespread terror campaign on the countryside, burning villages, executing peasants, and commandeering their herds. This repression served only to incite further peasant revolts. Rebellion now spread rapidly into the southern half of the province, then rolled in wave upon wave throughout much of rural Russia, sweeping from Saratov to Voronezh and Penza; to Smolensk, Belorussia, Novgorod and Tver; to the Ukraine, the middle Volga, the northern Caucasus and western Siberia.

In November 1920 Antonov was elected military chief of the rising, and deservedly so; as Radkey observes, he was 'an organizer of the first magnitude, converting bands of deserters and rustics into a regular army—the most formidable of all the Green forces—and mounting a system of communications and espionage that was the envy and—for long—the despair of his enemies.'²² By the end of 1920 Antonov had built up the Greens into a militia-army of about 20,000 uniformed men, mainly deserters from the Red Army as well as ordinary peasants. They were organized into various subsections (for machine guns, intelligence, communications, economics, supplies, and even a kind of peasant Cheka) that might be found in any sizable Red contingent. As Radkey observes, the Greens 'were constituted as a regular army and everywhere could be detected the skilled hand of military specialists. Though often operating in small detachments, Green forces were grouped in regiments, in brigades, and in two armies.'²³ In short, they now constituted a formidable threat to the Bolshevik regime.

Almost intuitively using tactics very similar to those of Makhno, Antonov's detachments were everywhere, appearing and disappearing at will. Like the *makhnovtsy*, they were largely horseborne and hence highly mobile, carrying on guerrilla operations that could vanish into a friendly village. Most of the peasant population supported them. In each village the STK—or simply the *obshchina* mobilized—fed and equipped the Green troops, gathered intelligence for them, helped with communications, and provided aid for the troops' families.

By end of 1920, the Greens had driven the Reds out of large parts of Tambov, and by March 1921 soviet power had ceased to exist in much of the province. Early in 1921, once the White armies were defeated, some 2.5 million Red Army soldiers were demobilized; many of them, on arriving home, joined up with the Greens. In a number of provinces Red Army soldiers mutinied and joined Green bands. These forces combined swelled the ranks of the Greens to a peak of 40,000.

Armed with crude weapons, the Greens waged what Orlando Figes calls 'a savage war of vengeance against the Communist regime' and 'what Lenin himself acknowledged was the greatest threat his regime had ever had to face.'²⁴ Waging a cruel guerrilla war, the Greens murdered—and often tortured—thousands of Bolsheviks, ransacked soviet and party offices, razed police stations and courts, looted schools, and especially destroyed grain collection centers. The grain they recovered was often duly carted back to the plundered villages. In midwinter of 1920–21 the Cheka reported that there were 118 peasant uprisings in the country, most notably in Saratov, Samara, Simbirsk, Penza and western Siberia.

But the fiercest struggle was waged in Tambov, where the Left SRs had sunk their deepest roots. In the spring of 1921 the Communist government was finally able to concentrate all the troops at its disposal against the Tambov insurgents—amounting to 50,000 battle-hardened soldiers, as well as abundant military equipment. These assets were placed, again, under the command of Tukhachevsky, who was fresh from suppressing the Kronstadt revolt. The Red commander launched a decisive assault on Antonov's forces and waged a campaign of mass terror against the villages that supported the uprising. Captured rebels and their families—in some cases, entire villages—were interned in concentration camps and later either executed or deported to the Arctic. About 100,000 in all were rounded up for imprisonment or deportation, and 15,000 were shot. Within a month the Reds—aided by a new famine—succeeded in suppressing the revolt.

Green detachments continued to roam parts of Tambov well into 1922, but they were eventually hunted down, and on 23 June 1922, Antonov was cornered and killed in a desperate gun battle. With Antonov's death—and with

the NEP in full gear—significant peasant resistance came to an end. The defeat of the Kronstadt uprising, in conjunction with the ban on factions at the Tenth Party Congress, had already brought the Russian Revolution to a definitive end. The 'third revolution' that had been attempted by a wide range of groups—the Workers' Opposition, the Left SRs, the Makhno movement, the Kronstadt sailors, and the Greens—had failed. After the fall of Kronstadt, any hope of restoring the all-too-brief accomplishments of 1917—free soviets, factory committees, independent unions, and democracy—was definitively vanquished. The defeat of the third revolution in Russia scarred the revolutionary tradition itself, contributing to the myth that revolution as such is inherently destructive and that what exists is always far preferable to ideals of what could be.

The most radical notions of social revolution had run their course in Russia to an extent that Bolshevik leaders before 1917 could never have anticipated. Marxian theory notwithstanding, revolution had occurred not in the most advanced capitalist country but in the least, under conditions that could not provide the material base for a socialist society. Lenin's gamble with history rested on his hope that a proletarian revolution in the East would be decided by a successful revolution in the West.

In the next few years, to be sure, the Russian Revolution shed sparks that blew westward and ignited in Europe. It was there that the proletariat produced flames of varying intensity—especially in Germany, the most industrialized country on the Continent with the most seemingly secure socialist tradition. But it would also be there that notions of proletarian hegemony and class solidarity were put to the ultimate test, with results that had decisive consequences for the rest of the twentieth century.

NOTES

1. W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 1989), pp. 302–3.
2. Quoted in Michael Palij, *The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918–1921: An Aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1976), p. 71.
3. Martin A. Miller, *Kropotkin* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 239.
4. Quoted in Lincoln, *Red Victory*, p. 326.
5. Voline, *The Unknown Revolution, 1917–1921*, trans. Holley Cantine (New York: Free Life Editions, 1974), p. 575.
6. 'Who Are the Makhnovists and What Are They Fighting For?' (Apr. 27, 1920), reprinted in Paul Avrich, ed., *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, Documents of Revolution series (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), pp. 135–6.
7. Palij, *Anarchism of Nestor Makhno*, p. 60.
8. Quoted in Lincoln, *Red Victory*, p. 321.
9. Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 124. In retrospect Serge was particularly troubled that the party had lied so brazenly, not only to the people but to its own membership. 'It had never happened before that our Party should lie to us like this,' he lamented, mourning the passing of the Revolution and its self-styled Bolshevik 'vanguard' (p. 125). The statement, however naïve, reveals how much party members still expected of their leaders even as late as 1921.
10. Quoted in Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils, 1905–1921*, trans. Ruth Hein (New York: Pantheon, 1974), p. 138.
11. Ivan Flerovsky, quoted in Paul Avrich, *Kronstadt 1921* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 57.
12. Quoted in Lincoln, *Red Victory*, p. 495.
13. Quoted in Israel Getzler, *Kronstadt 1917–1921: The Fate of a Soviet Democracy* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 212–13.
14. Quoted in Lincoln, *Red Victory*, p. 498.
15. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 500.
16. Kronstadt Provisional Revolutionary Committee, 'What We Are Fighting For' (Mar. 8, 1921), in Robert V. Daniels, ed., *A Documentary History of Communism in Russia* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1993), pp. 136–8, at 138; emphasis added.
17. Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (1931; rpt. New York: Dover, 1970), p. 2:884.
18. Lincoln, *Red Victory*, p. 506.
19. Getzler, *Kronstadt*, p. 243.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Oliver H. Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Soviet Russia: A Study of the Green Movement in the Tambov Region 1920–1921* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), p. 128.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
24. Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1996), pp. 755, 757.



Bibliographical Essay

Within the massive literature on these revolutions, the following English-language books were of particular interest to me in writing volume three of *The Third Revolution*.

PART VIII: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION OF 1905

Among general histories of Russia, Michael T. Florinsky's two-volume *Russia: A History and an Interpretation* (New York: Macmillan, 1947) is somewhat dated but nonetheless comprehensive, covering Russia from its very beginnings to 1945. Above all, the book is very readable. Nicholas V. Riasanovsky's, *A History of Russia* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), surveys Kievan, Muscovite, Imperial, and Soviet Russia. Bernard Pares's *A History of Russia* (New York: Random House, 1965), examines a wide range of factors—economic, political, clerical, military, and cultural—for each major period. Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552–1917* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), focuses on imperial Russia, from its beginnings up to 1917.

Several excellent books bring the reader directly into the workplace and the rural commune of prerevolutionary Russia. Donald Mackenzie Wallace, *Russia on the Eve of War and Revolution* (1877; rpt. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), written by a Briton who lived in Russia in the 1870s, describes prerevolutionary Russia based on personal experiences, interviews, and local documents. Olga Semyonova Tian-Shanskaia's *Village Life in Late Tsarist Russia*, trans. and ed. David L. Ransel and Michael Levine (Indianapolis, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993), is based on the author's four years of study of peasant life in the Russian village of the 1890s. Henri Troyat's *Daily Life in Russia*, trans. Malcolm Barnes (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1961), examines many aspects of daily life in Moscow in the year 1903.

Dorothy Atkinson, *The End of the Russian Land Commune, 1905–1930* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1983), examines the traditional agrarian commune with remarkable acuity, tracing it from its origins through the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the civil war, and various Soviet agrarian policies up to 1929. It refutes the Marxist myth that the commune was an archaism in its death throes under the assault of large-scale capitalist agriculture.

On the emergence of Russian populism in the nineteenth century, Franco Venturi's *The Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, trans. Francis Haskell (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960), is the indisputable classic, surveying in exhaustive detail Herzen, Bakunin, Chernyshevsky, Tkachev, and Lavrov, as well as populist groups culminating in the *Narodnaya Volya*. Avrahm Yarmolinsky's *Road to Revolution: A Century of Russian Radicalism* (London: Cassell, 1957) also focuses on the rise of that movement, starting in the 1830s. James H. Billington's *Mikhailovsky and Russian Populism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958) highlights the life and work of Nicholas Mikhailovsky, a populist theorist and leader active from the 1860s to about 1905, who edited several radical periodicals and was involved in the Chaikovsky circle. Robert Payne's *The Fortress* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957) traces the story of individual nineteenth-century revolutionaries, from the Decembrists to Bakunin and Chernyshevsky and later insurgents. The title refers to the Peter and Paul Fortress, where major Russian rebels under tsardom were long imprisoned.

On the emergence of the Russian labor movement, Semen I. Kanatchikov's *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia: The Autobiography of Semën Ivanovich Kanatchikov*, trans. and ed. Reginald E. Zelnik (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986), is the memoir of a peasant who participated in the *kruzhok* or study circle milieu of the 1890s and transformed himself into an author; the memoir ends in 1905. Victoria E. Bonnell's *Roots of Rebellion: Workers' Politics and Organizations in St Petersburg and Moscow, 1900–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), examines in detail the emergence of rebellion among workers who participated in trade unions and other voluntary associations in the last decades of tsardom. Richard Pipes's *Social Democracy and the St Petersburg Labor Movement, 1885–1897* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), gives a rich and vivid—albeit sometimes arguable—description of the early labor movement, including the *kruzhky*.

On the rise of the Social Democratic Party, Allan K. Wildman's *The Making of a Workers' Revolution: Russian Social Democracy, 1891–1903* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967) ably traces the early development of tendencies within Social Democracy that would emerge as Bolshevik and

Menshevik at the Second Party Congress. J.L.H. Keep's *The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) emphasizes the party as an institution, as distinct from the individuals who led it, from its formative years up to 1905. Bertram D. Wolfe's *Three Who Made a Revolution: A Biographical History* (New York: Dial Press, 1961) recounts the activities of Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin in almost novelistic fashion; this eminently readable history is nonetheless full of important information and insights. Leonard Schapiro's *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (1959; New York: Random House, 1960) traces the rise of the Bolshevik (later Communist) Party from the 'economist' controversy around 1900 to Stalin's death in 1953, with particular emphasis on Bolshevik conflicts with the Mensheviks before the Revolution and the creation of a totalitarian party-state afterwards.

On the origins and early development of the Socialist Revolutionaries, Maureen Perrie's *The Agrarian Policy of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party: From Its Origins Through the Revolution of 1905-1907* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), addresses the party's emergence out of populism; its program for the socialization of land, which was intended to embody the values of the *obshchina*; and its efforts to organize the peasantry as a revolutionary force comparable to the working class.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 is well covered in Sidney Harcave's *The Russian Revolution of 1905* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1970). This relatively brief book has an appendix of important documents related to the Revolution. Abraham B. Ascher's *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988) is a comprehensive account, emphasizing the Revolution's complexity. Solomon M. Schwarz's *The Russian Revolution of 1905: The Workers' Movement and the Formation of Bolshevism and Menshevism*, trans. Gertrude Vakar (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1961), examines how the Revolution heightened the contradictions between Bolshevism and Menshevism and accelerated their separation. Walter Sablinsky's *The Road to Bloody Sunday: Father Gapon and the St Petersburg Massacre of 1905* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), confines itself to the Revolution's opening phases, with particular emphasis on the ideas and activities of Father Gapon. Leon Trotsky, *1905*, trans. Anya Bostock (New York: Random House, 1971), is characteristically brilliant if seldom read. Gerald D. Surh's *1905 in Petersburg* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989) focuses specifically on the capital, while Laura Engelstein's *Moscow, 1905: Working-Class Organization and Political Conflict* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1982) is an excellent overview of the Moscow insurrection, emphasizing the various workers's institutions—factory and strike committees, popular assemblies, trade unions, and local councils—as well as workers's participation in the general strike.

PART IX: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS OF 1917

A comprehensive and authoritative account of the February Revolution is Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd, 1917* (Seattle, Wash. and London: University of Washington Press, 1981), which focuses intensively on the days between 23 February and 3 March, 1917, when tsardom collapsed and popular discontent erupted. On the July Days, the popular uprising of the following summer, the events are thoroughly explored in Alexander Rabinowitch's highly readable *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1968). An outstanding eyewitness account of the events from February to October is N. N. Sukhanov's *The Russian Revolution 1917*, ed. and trans. Joel Carmichael (London: Oxford University Press, 1955). This memoir by a Menshevik Internationalist was published in the Soviet Union in 1922 but banned a few years later by Stalin because of its critical attitude towards the Bolsheviks.

On the October Revolution, E.H. Carr's three-volume *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923* (1952; rpt. New York: W.W. Norton, 1985) remains highly informative. Nor has time eroded the importance of William Chamberlin's two-volume *The Russian Revolution, 1917-1921* (1935; rpt. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1965), which is still an important source, narrating the events of the Revolution and civil war, with invaluable appendices. While both Carr and Chamberlin were sympathetic to the Soviet Union, neither book is so burdened by ideology as to be tendentious. More recently, Orlando Figes's *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1996) is an award-winning history of the entire revolutionary period from the 1890s to 1924; its discussion of the radical intelligentsia is particularly fascinating. Edward Acton, Vladimir Iu. Cherniaev, and William G. Rosenberg, *A Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution, 1914-1921* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1997) is a valuable collection of essays on the Revolution, its various political parties, institutions, personal biographies, and social tendencies.

Several recent accounts of the Bolshevik seizure of power are so vivid that they bring the reader into the streets. R.V. Daniels's *Red October: The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1967) is also a dramatic narrative that goes beyond the myths and looks at the days immediately before, during, and after the Revolution; it was criticized by Marxists for showing that accident played a role in those crucial days. Alexander Rabinowitch's *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), takes a somewhat wider focus, tracing the behavior of the Bolsheviks in Petrograd from the July uprising through the seizure of power in October. Rex A. Wade, *Red Guards and Workers' Militias in the Russian Revo-*

lution (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1984), explores the armed proletarian revolutionary forces in Petrograd in 1917.

On the working class during the revolutionary period, David Mandel's *The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power: From the July Days 1917 to July 1918* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1984), reconstructs the revolution from below in Petrograd's working-class districts; their behavior, he argues, was driven not by unrealistic hopes but by rational responses to grim social realities. J.L.H. Keep's *The Russian Revolution: A Study in Mass Mobilization* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976) ably examines the role of both workers and peasants in the Revolution and the social conditions that contributed to their political behavior.

Several important works concentrate on workers's control in 1917 and afterwards. Frederick I. Kaplan's *Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labor, 1917-1920: The Formative Years* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1968), examines the labor movement—including workers's control, factory committees, and trade unions—from its efflorescence after the February Revolution until its subjugation by the Communists. S.A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories, 1917-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), discusses the Petrograd working class just before the February Revolution, as well as factory conditions under the tsarist regime; changes produced by the February Revolution; the factory committees and trade unions; workers's control; the structure of the labor movement; the October Revolution and its effect on the organization of industry; and the fate of workers's control up to June 1918. Maurice Brinton's *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control: The State and Counter-Revolution* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1975) is an outline of the Bolsheviks's cynical appropriation of the concept of workers's control and their suppression of its institutions once they were in power. J.B. Sorenson's *The Life and Death of Soviet Trade Unionism, 1917-1928* (New York: Atherton Press, 1969) provides a comprehensive account of the Bolshevik takeover of the labor movement.

On the soviets, the best source to my knowledge is Oskar Anweiler's *The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils, 1905-1921*, trans. Ruth Hein (New York: Pantheon, 1974). This major historical contribution examines the antecedents of the soviets in both theory and practice, analyzes their popular role in the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, and shows how they were transformed into top-down administrative units thereafter. T.H. Rigby's *Lenin's Government: Sovnarkom, 1917-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), examines the Council of People's Commissars, through which the rule of the Communist Party was institutionalized during the first years of Soviet Russia, and explains its structure and operations.

On the civil war, W. Bruce Lincoln's *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), is a lively yet authoritative narrative of the many campaigns, forces, and phases of this very complex event. Vladimir N. Brovkin's *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918–1922* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994) masterfully presents the political struggles within and among the various political parties during the civil war. This fascinating and groundbreaking book presents the civil war itself as an interaction of Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, SRs, Left SRs, Whites, Greens, Ukrainians, anarchists, and other groups and movements.

Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution, 1917–1921* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), with useful tables, maps, and glossary, shows how the developments in the Russian countryside made possible the Bolshevik victory in the civil war. On the 'Green' revolt, Oliver H. Radkey's *The Unknown Civil War in Russia: A Study of the Green Movement in the Tambov Region, 1920–1921* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1976) is pioneering and remains immensely informative.

On the oppositional tendencies to Bolshevism, both from within and outside the party, the reader should consult Leonard Schapiro's *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy: Political Opposition in the Soviet State, First Phase 1917–1922*, 2nd ed. (1954; rpt. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977). This comprehensive study of Lenin's political opposition covers both individuals (like Martov, Trotsky and Bukharin) and groups (the PSR, the Left SRs, the Left Communists, the Mensheviks, the Workers's Opposition, and others). Robert Vincent Daniels examines left oppositional tendencies within Russian Communism in his immensely readable *The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), covering oppositional groups and events from the Bolshevik factions of 1917 to the condemnation of Bukharin in 1929.

Oliver H. Radkey's *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism: Promise and Default of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries, February to October 1917* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958) cuts through the many mystifications surrounding the PSR to examine its populist roots, its internal conflicts, and its behavior during the Revolutions of February and October. Its sequel, Radkey's *The Sickle Under the Hammer: The Russian Socialist Revolutionaries in the Early Months of Soviet Rule* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963), discusses the PSR and the Left SRs after the Revolution, in the Constituent Assembly events, and into the civil war. I. Steinberg's *Spiridonova: Revolutionary Terrorist*, trans. and ed. Gwenda David and Eric Mosbacher (London: Methuen, 1935), is an elegiac biography of the Left SRs's foremost leader, written by a Left SR member of the Sovnarkom soon after the October Revolution.

On the Mensheviks in the revolutionary period, Vladimir N. Brovkin, *The Mensheviks After October: Socialist Opposition and the Rise of the Bolshevik Dictatorship* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1987); Leopold H. Haimson, ed., *The Mensheviks: From the Revolution of 1917 to the Second World War*, trans. Gertrude Vakar (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974); and Ziva Galli, *The Menshevik Leaders in the Russian Revolution: Social Realities and Political Strategies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), are all invaluable. Israel Getzler's *Martov: A Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) recounts the Menshevik Internationalist leader's political ideas and activities in the revolutionary movement.

On the anarchists in the revolutionary period, Paul Avrich's *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution* in the Documents of Revolution series (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), contains documentary materials of historical importance to the libertarian movement. Michael Palij's *The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918–1921: An Aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1976), is a comprehensive account of the life of Makhno, the partisan military campaigns he led against both Whites and Bolsheviks, and the peasant movement that followed him. From an anarchist standpoint, Peter Arshinov's *History of the Makhnovist Movement, 1918–1921*, trans. Lorraine and Fredy Perlman (Chicago: Solidarity, 1974), which might well be subtitled 'a study in war anarchism,' suffers from the same overpowering ideological bias as Voline's history of the Revolution, mentioned below.

Much insight can be gained from biographies of the Russian revolutionary leaders. Robert Service's definitive three-volume account of Lenin's political career, *Lenin: A Political Life* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985), and the same author's absorbing one-volume *Lenin: A Biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000) are both invaluable sources. Service's work is unique in being free both of the reverential view held by Lenin's admirers and the demonic view held by his opponents. Of exceptional interest is Leon Trotsky's *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (New York: Pathfinder, 1970), which offers informative accounts of the classical socialist movement before the Great War through the author's expulsion from Russia by Stalin, with remarkable vignettes of individual figures in the revolutionary movements.

On the Kronstadt revolt, Paul Avrich's *Kronstadt, 1921* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970) is an excellent account; the author is invaluable in fathoming the motives of the rebellious sailors. Israel Getzler's *Kronstadt, 1917–1921: The Fate of a Soviet Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) is another immensely important history, placing a special focus on Kronstadt of 1917–18 as a 'forgotten golden age of Soviet democracy.'

Many useful collections of documents have been published over the years. For a collection that is highly comprehensive but not overly burdened with secondary material, I would recommend James Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, eds., *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1918: Documents and Materials* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1934). It is an indispensable compilation, as is James Bunyan, ed., *Intervention, Civil War, and Communism in Russia, April–December 1918, Documents and Materials* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins, 1936). F.A. Golder, ed., *Documents of Russian History, 1914–1917*, trans. Emanuel Aronsberg (1927; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), is an excellent compilation of material drawn primarily from the Bolshevik newspaper *Izvestia* and the Kadet newspaper *Riech*.

By far the best Bolshevik-inspired account of the Revolution is Leon Trotsky's three-volume *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (1932; rpt. New York: Pathfinder, 1980). Interpreting a historic event in which he played a major role, the author makes no pretense that his account—stylistically sparkling, rich in detail, and theoretically insightful—is not tendentious. A major weakness is that it all but ignores the popular movement itself—except in a few colorful chapters, the workers, peasants, and soldiers are dim figures. Moreover, parties and groups apart from the Bolsheviks play no constructive role, and revolutionaries's concerns about the emergence of an autocracy are understated or ignored. A conservative view of the Revolution is Richard Pipes's *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991). This exhaustively researched account, which might have been a compelling history, is marred by the author's unmitigated aversion towards the Bolsheviks.

Voline's *The Unknown Revolution, 1917–1921* (1954; rpt. New York: Free Life Editions, 1974) is a valuable source of neglected aspects of the popular movement in the Revolution but is permeated by ideological bias. Voline was a pseudonym for the anarchist V.M. Eichenbaum. The book, originally published in 1947 in France, portrays the Bolsheviks as hypocrites who never err but only 'betray' (a view that leaves the left opposition within Bolshevism, including worker-militants like Shliapnikov and Kollontai, poorly represented). Voline endows popular spontaneity with almost mystical qualities and oversimplifies very complex social developments.

Victor Serge's *Year One of the Russian Revolution*, trans. and ed. Peter Sedgwick (1972; rpt. London: Bookmarks and Pluto Press, 1992), originally published in French in 1930, reflects the idealism and the high hopes of the early months of the Revolution. Serge's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901–1941*, trans. Peter Sedgwick (London: Oxford University Press, 1963) is a first-person account of pre-World War I era socialism and the idealistic summits to which socialism ascended, in a cause that was as ethical as it was insurrectionary; a theme which will be further explored in volume four.

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